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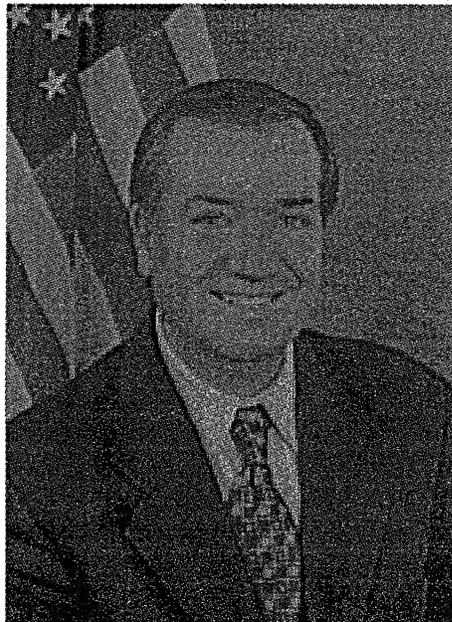
## The Philippines is Back

By Rep. Ed Royce

FOR YEARS, the U.S.-Philippine relationship has been an afterthought. Despite a mutual defense treaty and long history between the two countries, the Philippines hasn't received much attention for decades in Washington. This week, we heard strong evidence that this is changing, rapidly.

I chair the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, part of the Foreign Affairs Committee. The Philippines hadn't been subject of a congressional hearing for years. I moved to change that, calling a hearing to bring attention to this important relationship by having top State and Defense Department officials report to the Subcommittee and answer our questions about U.S. policy toward the Philippines.

*Continued on page 14*



Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA)

After I recognized Philippine Ambassador Jose Cuisia in the audience to express sympathies to the Filipino people for the deaths brought about by the recent earthquake, Curt Campbell spoke. The Assistant Secretary of State told the Subcommittee that U.S. relations with the Philippines was "on the verge of a renaissance," with their being "enormous possibilities" to better work together. He added that no other country in Asia was as welcoming of the United States. I agree.

Since 9/11, the U.S. and the Philippines have been closely cooperating on combating terrorism, Dr. Peter Lavoy, the Defense Department official, told us. U.S. Special Forces have worked under the Armed Forces of the Philippines, providing training, logistics and other support to root out terrorist organizations seeking sanctuary in the southern Philippines - and with a good deal of success. Just last week, Philippine forces killed some of Southeast Asia's most wanted terrorists.

Encouragingly, U.S.-Philippine security cooperation is expanding beyond counterterrorism. Last year, the U.S. transferred the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton to the Philippine Navy. Renamed the Gregorio del Pilar, this ship - originally commissioned in 1967 - immediately became the Philippine Navy's flagship vessel. I was pleased to announce that the congressional review process for another ship - Coast Guard Cutter Dallas - wraps up this week. It should soon be on its way to Manila.

Aggressive Chinese claims on the South China Sea - or the West Philippine Sea as it is referred to in Manila - are driving the nations of Southeast Asia to seek closer U.S. ties. Chinese ships have fired live rounds at Filipino fisherman and severed Philippine oil survey cables. We discussed a congressional resolution I am co-sponsoring that calls for peace and stability in the region. There is a sense in Washington that security and defense cooperation is firmly rooted, but that much more needs to be done to promote economic cooperation.

For too many years, the Philippines has suffered from economic malaise as its neighbors have soared. The problems have been bad government, corruption, and generally harmful economic policies. Finally there are signs that conditions are improving. The U.S. should do its part to help.

The U.S.-Philippines Partnership for Growth is assisting the Aquino government to make good on its anti-corruption commitment. Positive steps have been taken, but the corruption challenges are great, which is what the Filipino American community has told me for years. Legislation that I am supporting - the SAVE Act - would restore to the Philippines preferential access to the U.S. market for many clothing items. This aims to reverse the loss of hundreds of thousands of Filipino apparel assembly jobs that went to China and Vietnam when the global apparel quota system was lifted seven years ago. We should give a leg up to our important Manila ally, I told the hearing audience.

Traditionally, the U.S. has been the Philippines biggest trading partner. It still is, but China is closing fast. I want to see trade and investment between the U.S. and the Philippines flourish. There is great potential in California alone, especially with its entrepreneurial Filipino American community ready to step forward. Manila has an interest in joining its neighbors and the U.S. in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an important potential trade agreement. I will be encouraging the U.S. Trade Representative to continue exploring this possibility.

The Philippines must keep fighting corruption. The Filipino people deserve better than the ineffective governments they have suffered through for decades. If the Aquino government sticks to this task though, the renaissance between the two countries that Assistant Secretary Campbell described will have a strong economic basis. Let's all work together to bring the Philippines back.