

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

We believe we can fly

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House on the first day of the conference, led by hundreds of uniformed Filipino veterans, to demand "equity now."

For the first time, the veterans issue became a national campaign for justice.

Eleven years later and we're still fighting.

The veterans issue was a staple in the previous empowerment conferences, from the 2nd also held in Washington, DC to the 3rd national convention held in New York in 1999.

Hosted by the Eastern Region and chaired by Loida Nicolas Lewis, the 1999 convention's theme "Filipino Americans Leading the Way to the Millennium" affirmed NaFFAA's vision of establishing a solid and powerful presence of Filipino Americans in the United States.

Its keynote speaker then was no other than then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

NaFFAA National Chairman Alex A. Esclamado summed up the First Lady's appearance on

a historical note. "Hillary Rodham Clinton becomes the first White House resident to honor the Filipino American community with her appearance as Keynote Speaker at a public function in the entire 412 years of presence of the Filipino in America.

As a community, we have finally earned a seat at the table of power. The recognition given us by the First Lady should propel NaFFAA to greater heights in its struggle for national unification and empowerment of Filipino Americans in all facets of American society."

Untold history There are several Filipino American historic tidbits that have fallen through the cracks, stories that have not been told or tales that, for one reason or another stayed stuck in history books.

Not a lot of people know about Thelma Garcia Buchholdt.

She was the first Filipino-American woman legislator in America elected to the Alaska House of Representatives in 1974 as an Ad Hoc Democrat and was re-elected in 1976, 1978 and 1980. A former Alaska legislator, Buchholdt was also a civil rights leader, author and attorney.

Or about Peter Aduja who became the first Filipino American elected to public office, as a member of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives in

1955. Ever heard of Larry Asera, elected as the youngest member of the Vallejo City Council in 1974 at the age of 24? He was the first Filipino American to be elected in the US mainland.

The same year also saw Eduardo E. Malapit elected in Kauai, Hawai'i as the first Filipino American mayor in America. Their stories, and those of the community's unsung heroes, must not be ignored. We should continue to tell the achievements to the next generation, especially on how they got themselves elected when there weren't even that many Filipinos back in the day.

Looking forward This year, "Forging a New Filipino-American Agenda for the 21st Century" is the theme of the three-day national conference, in fact the 8th NaFFAA Empowerment Conference, that will be held at the Westin Hotel in the heart of downtown Seattle.

"We hope to encourage Filipino Americans to be actively involved in getting out the vote in November and become more engaged in the elections. This is what community empowerment is all about," said Alma Q. Kern, NaFFAA National Chair. In partnership with the Pacific Northwest Filipino Chamber of Commerce, Kern and the NaFFAA officials are making sure that the biennial conference will be worth every Filipino participant's while.

"The conference will focus on political empowerment, human and health services, economic development, youth education, cultural programs, the media, and arts. It will be an opportunity to meet community leaders and advocates from different states and countries who have championed the causes of Filipinos and Filipino Americans and hear of their successes, to move forward and be empowered at all levels," Kern added.



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Deborah L. Karapetian is licensed as an attorney in both California and Texas, and an active member of the State Bar of California. All matters handled by her office are case specific, and the outcome depends on the specific facts of each case.

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