

Quintin Paredes

1884–1973

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER 1935–1938
NACIONALISTA FROM THE PHILIPPINES

As the first Resident Commissioner to represent the Philippines after it became a commonwealth of the United States, Quintin Paredes worked to revise the economic relationship between his native archipelago and the mainland. Paredes championed Philippine independence, constantly reminding policymakers of his home's history as a valuable and vital trading partner. In testimony before congressional committees and in speeches on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, Paredes countered common misconceptions about Filipinos and worked to place the islands on stable economic footing as they moved toward independence.

One of 10 children, Quintin Paredes was born in the northwestern town of Bangued, in the Philippines' Abra Province, on September 9, 1884, to Juan Felix and Regina Babila Paredes. Around the time of Quintin's birth, Juan Felix opened a primary school in Bangued and earned a reputation as a strict and uncompromising educator. Quintin attended his father's school until he was about 11 years old, at which point he began studying at a satellite campus of the University of Santo Tomas and later at the Colegio de la Purissima Concepción in the coastal city of Vigan.¹

In the late 1890s, the Spanish-American War interrupted Paredes's education, and he returned home from school as the American military advanced up the islands. At one point, his family housed two U.S. troops who had been captured as prisoners of war, and because of the close quarters in the Paredes family home, the GIs taught Quintin how to speak English. When U.S. forces finally captured Bangued, the military made Quintin and his brother, Marin, interpreters even though neither brother was proficient. "The truth is," Quintin later remembered, "I had to learn English from the barrel of a gun!"²

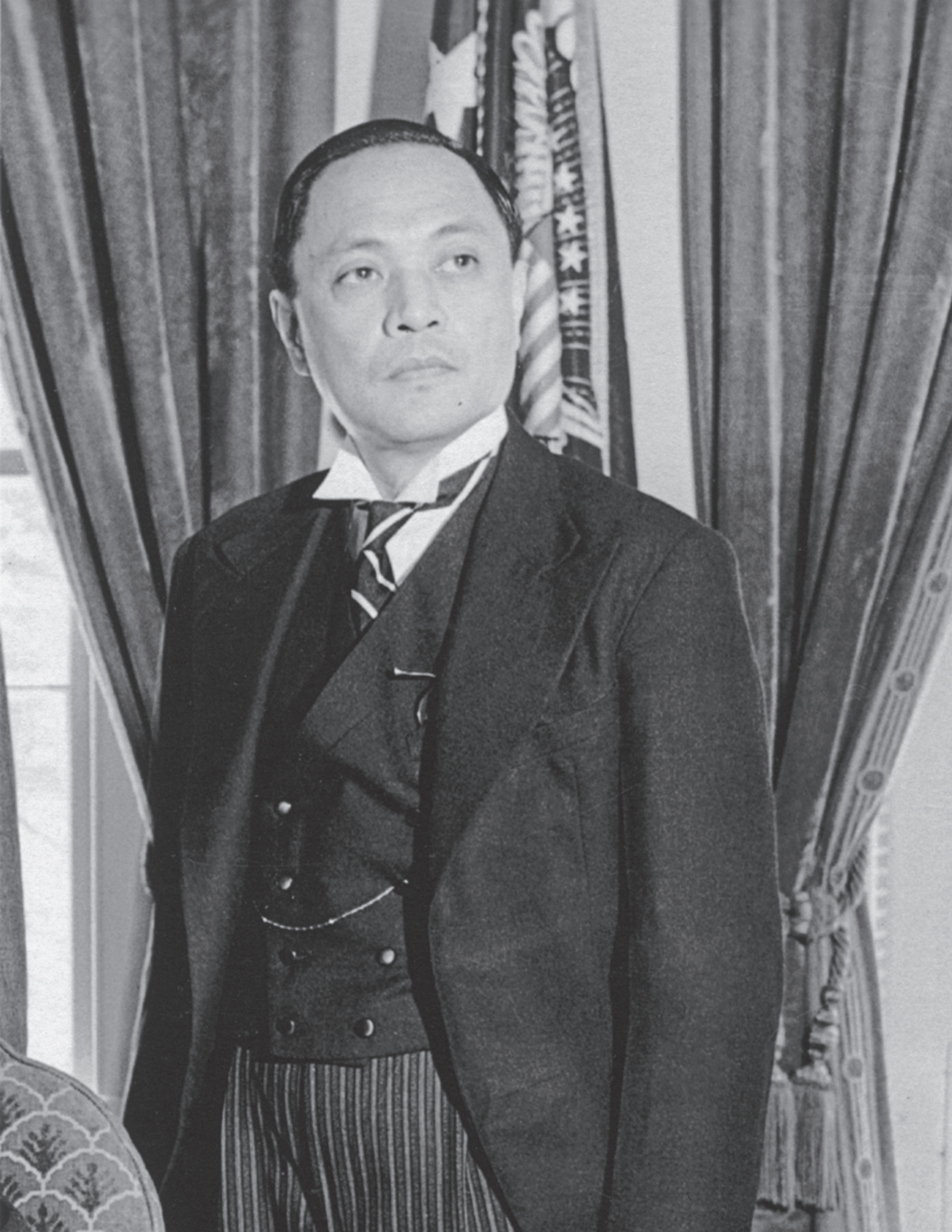
After the war, Paredes served as deputy treasurer of Abra, collecting taxes from all corners of the province.³ He

eventually moved to Manila and studied law under the direction of another of his brothers, Isidro. He worked during the day, studied at night, and after passing the bar exam, Paredes briefly took a job with the Filipino government in Manila before moving to the private sector.⁴ Paredes married Victoria Peralta, and the couple had 10 children.⁵

In 1908 Paredes joined the solicitor general's office in Manila as a prosecuting attorney and rapidly rose to the solicitor general post in 1917. The very next year, Paredes accepted the job as attorney general, becoming the Philippines' top lawyer. Within two years, he became secretary of justice in the cabinet of Governor General Francis Burton Harrison, a former Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from New York. President Woodrow Wilson nominated Paredes to serve as an associate justice on the Philippine supreme court, but Wilson's administration ended before the confirmation went through. Paredes also served as an officer in the Philippine national guard during the mobilization for World War I.⁶

After 13 years as an attorney for the government, Paredes resigned as secretary of justice ahead of the administration change in Manila and formed his own law firm in 1921. As Paredes's daughter would later write, "The courtroom drama fascinated him more than anything else."⁷

In 1925, after four years of private practice, Paredes fell into political office by something of an accident. While stumping for his nephew's assembly campaign in Abra, local leaders asked Paredes to run for the seat instead. His nephew agreed to the plan, dropped out, and threw his support behind Paredes. Paredes won and eventually served four terms in the territorial legislature. His early career in the Philippine house was ambitious. He chaired the rules committee and led a revolt against house leadership, challenging Manuel Roxas, the sitting speaker, in an effort





to empower the rank and file. “If the Chair does not have the full support of the substantial number of the majority,” Paredes reportedly said, “trouble is bound to brew and the program of legislation cannot be carried out effectively.”⁸ The coup attempt failed, but Paredes won the position of speaker pro tempore after Roxas went on a trade mission to the United States and immediately used his new power to quicken the legislative pace.⁹

Elected speaker pro tempore again in 1931, Paredes led the Philippine house’s opposition to the Hare–Hawes–Cutting Act, in which the U.S. Congress promised the Philippines its independence after a phase-in period of 10 years. But the new act needed the approval of the Philippine legislature to go into effect.¹⁰ And as Paredes understood the law, the Hare–Hawes–Cutting Act would have crippled the islands’ economy and imposed severe immigration quotas for Filipinos going to America.¹¹ In many respects, the controversial independence bill became a litmus test in the Philippine house. Eventually, opponents of the measure generated enough support to oust Roxas, the speaker, who backed the bill, and install Paredes in his place.¹² During this period, Paredes and senate president Manuel L. Quezon became close allies. Quezon had smoothed Paredes’s move up to the speakership, and, by 1934, the *Philippines Herald* described Paredes as Quezon’s “mightiest political general.”¹³ But Paredes’s deft handling of the house, combined with his growing national profile, also set him on a collision course with Quezon over control of the islands’ future.¹⁴

Despite his outsized role in the debate surrounding independence, Paredes, according to one description, was “quiet, observant, and thoughtful, the very figure of efficient activity and erudition.”¹⁵ He was cool under pressure, calculating, patient, and obsessed with legislative details, further straining his relationship with Quezon.¹⁶ For Paredes, it was not enough to simply achieve independence for the islands; the legislation granting independence needed to give the archipelago every chance to thrive as an autonomous nation. “If you want to do anything,” he once said, “always do it well. Then perhaps luck will come.”¹⁷

In 1934 Congress revisited Philippine independence and passed the Tydings–McDuffie Act, which made the Philippines a commonwealth of the United States and addressed some of the criticisms that had doomed the Hare–Hawes–Cutting Act. Per the new agreement, after 10 years and the adoption of a new constitution, the Philippines would officially become an independent country. The change in insular status injected a new dynamic in the islands’ politics. With Tydings–McDuffie in place, the main issue dividing the ruling Partido Nacionalista—the terms for an independent Philippines—no longer dominated the debate. In the assembly, Quezon decided the reunited majority party now needed a speaker who could appeal to everyone, not just to those who opposed the earlier independence bill. Quezon was the clear head of the ruling party, but Paredes had been a strong, independent speaker, and his popularity had skyrocketed. Quezon considered Paredes dangerous on two fronts: Paredes, with his loyal following, directly threatened Quezon’s personal authority; and, constitutionally, Paredes’s authority as speaker might limit the president’s power, motivating Quezon to decentralize power in the legislature by empowering the committees.¹⁸

Quezon quickly convinced a number of assembly members to support his committee overhaul. When the majority party named Paredes to the weakened speaker’s office, he rejected the nomination. “Paredes wanted the position of speaker to be strong, so that the system of checks and balances as practiced in the U.S. government could function in the Philippines,” wrote an historian of the controversy. For his part, Paredes preferred to serve in the rank and file rather than stand as “a puppet Speaker.”¹⁹

Even with Paredes out of leadership, Quezon still considered him a political threat. Unable to fully dilute the former speaker’s influence, Quezon did the next closest thing: he offered Paredes a job more than 8,000 miles away as the Philippines’ Resident Commissioner to the U.S. Congress. Paredes knew that if he took the appointment in Washington, he would likely lose power back home. At first, he rejected the post, but after Quezon questioned his commitment to public service, Paredes accepted on December 21, 1935.²⁰ “I



consider it my duty to counteract all reactionary measures in Congress prejudicial to the Philippines,” he said after being sworn in by Philippine officials.²¹

Paredes sailed for the United States on January 11, 1936, devoting his short time at home to studying the economic relationship between the commonwealth and the United States. He pledged to revise sections of the Tydings–McDuffie Act that he believed would both hinder trade and impede the Philippines’ economic growth.²² Tariffs on Philippine goods exported to the United States were set to rise gradually in 1940 so that, by the time the commonwealth became independent, Philippine businesses would have to pay the taxes in full. Many observers expected Congress to renegotiate the terms of the deal, but by the time Paredes arrived in Washington, nothing had been finalized.²³

Shortly after noon on Friday, February 14, 1936, Paredes walked to the well of the House and took the oath of office as a Member of the 74th Congress (1935–1937). The day before, he had met briefly at the White House with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of War George Dern, and Creed Cox of the Bureau of Insular Affairs. Paredes also revealed that Quezon had asked him to open an embassy in DC.²⁴

As Resident Commissioner, Paredes focused on two main objectives. First, he remained committed to revising the tariff rates in Tydings–McDuffie. For an island nation that traded almost exclusively with the United States, “the [law’s] provisions will wreck our economic structure,” he said in an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor* in May 1936, and he feared the restrictions in Tydings–McDuffie would “breed discontent and unrest, and perhaps disorder in the islands.”²⁵ Paredes hoped certain changes would buy the Philippines’ economy enough time to hold its own on a global playing field. Secondly, he sought to convince Congress to protect a nearly \$24 million line of credit at the Treasury Department after a reserve fund the Philippines stored with the United States missed out on an easy chance to gain in value with the gold standard.²⁶

In the House, Paredes also addressed a handful of other, more immediate issues that affected Filipinos living

in the United States. After the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 forced shipowners in the New York area to fire nearly 3,000 Filipinos because they had been classified as “aliens,” Paredes threw his support behind a measure introduced by Senator Allen Ellender of Louisiana to allow the sailors who had legally lived in the United States before the passage of Tydings–McDuffie to get their jobs back.²⁷ Similarly, Paredes lobbied the Senate Appropriations Committee to remove discriminatory language against Filipino government workers in a funding bill for the Treasury Department and U.S. Post Office.²⁸

A month before Paredes arrived in Washington, Democratic Senator Alva Adams of Colorado introduced a bill to overturn an earlier law that authorized the Treasury Department to set aside nearly \$24 million in credit for the Philippines. The government had opened the line of credit after the commonwealth’s reserve fund housed in the United States failed to earn value following an increase in the price of gold. The controversy dated back to 1932, when the Philippine government followed the advice of American officials and stored roughly \$56 million in U.S. banks. Almost from the start Philippine leaders had asked to convert that cash deposit into gold, but Treasury officials never followed through. After the price of gold increased, the Philippines lost out on substantial profit, and the \$24 million credit was meant to cover the difference of the Philippines’ investment.²⁹

Unfortunately for the Philippines, Congress had only authorized the Treasury credit and had never appropriated any money for it. Moreover, a number of Members supported Senator Adams’s effort to repeal the credit altogether.³⁰ Seeing as how Paredes had been in Washington for only a few days when he first went before the Senate Banking and Currency Committee to discuss the currency issue, he admitted that he was “not very familiar with the technical questions involved.”³¹ The committee agreed to reschedule, giving Paredes time to prepare over the next week.

When Paredes testified before the Senate committee again on March 5, 1936, he implored the panel to fund the back payment, arguing that U.S. officials had never



acted on the Philippines' request to convert its deposit into gold.³² Despite his appeal, the Senate committee went ahead with the repeal measure, claiming that Congress misunderstood the situation when it first authorized the credit line.³³ The Senate passed Adams's repeal bill on May 18, 1936, which Paredes called both "surprising" and "most unfair." When the House received the bill, however, the Committee on Insular Affairs took no action on it during the legislative session.³⁴

Although Congress had taken the lead on the Treasury issue, it more or less deferred to the President on the tariff, and the House spent little time revisiting the scheduled rate hikes in Tydings–McDuffie during Paredes's time on the Hill. Nevertheless, Paredes made the Philippines' trade relationship the first thing he spoke about on the floor. He commended Congress for paving the way for the Philippines' full political independence but cautioned the House against ending America's open economic ties to the Pacific. Paredes sympathized with Congress's efforts to combat the Great Depression, but he didn't want to see a similar financial catastrophe hit the islands. He pointed out that, in the short while since Tydings–McDuffie went into effect, Congress had already gone after the Philippines by lowering the sugar quota, capping cordage exports, and levying new taxes on coconut oil. While he did not expect special treatment for the Philippines, Paredes wanted Congress to follow the "spirit" of the independence agreement, urging the House to lift some of the new fees.³⁵

A month later, in May 1936, Paredes again spoke on the House Floor about the U.S.–Philippine trade partnership, pointing out that Congress, not the Philippines, dictated the terms of the relationship which had started out "on the basis of free trade." Imposing new taxes to protect American farmers, he argued, would undercut that foundation. "Fair treatment for our Philippine sugar industry will not injure a single beet-sugar or cane-sugar producer in the United States. . . . All we ask is that, while under the American flag, we be treated fairly and equitably with other Territories and possessions of the United States," he said defiantly.³⁶

In March 1937, during testimony on sugar quotas

before a House Agriculture subcommittee, Paredes drove home his point. He knew that domestic sugar producers would call for higher tariffs to protect their product, "but it is a fact that in the case of the Philippines there exists an implied contract derived from the independence law not to impose taxes. . . . By subjecting our sugar to excise taxes provided in the bill this preference is wiped out and the spirit of the independence law violated." The main problem, Paredes noted, was that the Philippines had little influence in Washington. He reminded the subcommittee that he couldn't vote on tariff bills, "which makes the imposition of excise taxes on Philippine sugar sound like taxation without representation."³⁷

During Paredes's House career, isolationist Members who wanted the United States to pull out of the Pacific, regardless of the impact on the commonwealth's economy, appeared to have a controlling interest in Congress. The *Washington Post* noted in a separate article that such thinking also permeated public opinion. As early as the summer of 1936, Paredes reported renewed "prejudices" against the Philippines. Both Democrats and Republicans, the *Post* said, accused the commonwealth of "[forcing] America to grant independence out of ingratitude." The paper also suspected that the public relations campaign by "American labor, sugar, dairy, cordage and other industries" to cast the Philippines as a direct competitor likely helped sour the mood on the Hill.³⁸

The Roosevelt administration took a less drastic approach, however, and in 1937, after President Quezon suggested moving Philippine independence up to as early as 1938, he and FDR agreed to create the Joint Preparatory Committee on Philippine Affairs in order to study trade issues affecting the two countries, specifically tariff rates.³⁹ "If and when independence does finally come," Paredes wrote to the editor of the *Baltimore Sun* in the spring of 1937, just two months after being assigned to the joint committee, "I hope that the American people will find no necessity for ending the mutually beneficial United States-Philippines trade relations." Paredes pointed out that exports from his commonwealth did not so much compete with America's domestic industries as they complemented



the United States' existing markets for "sugar, coconut oil, tobacco, [and] cordage." Moreover, he wrote, higher tariffs would discourage the Philippines, already one of the United States' largest customers, from importing American goods.⁴⁰

Paredes was the only Member of the House to sit on the joint committee, which held hearings in Washington, San Francisco, and Manila and included a three-month investigation in the Philippines. After a year of work, the members of the committee agreed to keep the date of Philippine independence set at 1946, but they decided to slow down the rise in tariffs affecting Philippine exports. With an agreement in principle, the committee recommended that the full rates go into effect by 1960, giving the commonwealth's economy an extra 15 years to adjust to independence.⁴¹

Paredes resigned from the House before Congress took a close look at the Joint Preparatory Committee's recommendations.⁴² His initial reluctance to accept the position as Resident Commissioner, combined with some later remarks he made in the summer of 1937, suggest that he had set his sights on returning to the Philippines as quickly as he could. On August 18, 1937, just days before he left for Manila to participate in the Joint Preparatory Committee hearings, Paredes used the "Extensions of Remarks" section of the *Congressional Record* to deliver a speech titled "United States-Philippine Affairs." What started out as a summary of the Joint Preparatory Committee's agenda soon had the feel of a farewell address. After applauding the House for "making the newcomer feel comfortable," he continued, "I have nothing but thanks for all the many courtesies extended to me here. I appreciate the privilege of having served with you in this I consider the greatest legislative body in the world." He even touted his likely successor, Joaquin M. Elizalde.⁴³

In case there was any doubt about Paredes's desire to return home, mainland newspapers began reporting in April 1938, months before Paredes formally announced his resignation, that Elizalde, "who, authoritative sources said would succeed Quintin Paredes as resident Philippine commissioner in the United States," had already sailed for

Washington. Three months later, after Congress adjourned for the year, Paredes set off for home in order to leave enough time to campaign for his old seat in the Philippine legislature. He officially resigned from the House on September 29, 1938.⁴⁴

Despite their earlier rivalry, Quezon complimented Paredes. "There is no gainsaying the fact that you are entitled to a great amount of the credit for assisting in the passage of many pieces of legislation favorable to the Philippines and vigorously fighting unjust and adverse bills which embodied threats of harm to us economically as well as politically," Quezon told him.⁴⁵

Once back in the Philippines, Paredes reclaimed his seat as a representative of the Abra Province, serving as floor leader in the assembly. He later won election to the Philippine senate, serving from 1941 to 1945. With the outbreak of World War II, Paredes did not flee the islands, but served in the Japanese occupation government as a commissioner of public works and as secretary of justice, "motivated by a patriotic desire to protect the Filipinos when he took the Cabinet position," his defense lawyers would later argue.⁴⁶

In the spring of 1945, U.S. military forces arrested Paredes, and the commonwealth government later charged him with 21 counts of treason as an active collaborator.⁴⁷ Despite these accusations, voters elected Paredes, who was out on bail, to the Philippine house a month later in 1946.⁴⁸ After courts acquitted him in 1948, Paredes returned to serve in the Philippine legislature throughout the 1950s.⁴⁹ In 1952 the Philippine senate elected him as its president.⁵⁰ He also resumed his law practice and was later president of a bank. He died in Manila on January 30, 1973.⁵¹

"An admiring nation will remember him for his untiring labors on behalf of Philippine independence," said former Resident Commissioner Carlos Peña Romulo. "He may well be the last of this fearless breed, the versatile group of men of wide learning and deep human concerns who passionately devoted their lives to the cause of their people."⁵²



FOR FURTHER READING

Paredes-San Diego, Lourdes. *Don Quintin of Abra* (Quezon City, PI: L. Paredes-San Diego, 1985).

NOTES

- 1 Lourdes Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra* (Quezon City, PI: L. Paredes-San Diego, 1985): 7, 9, 11–12.
- 2 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 14–16.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 19–23. Paredes's brother held lessons in his home in Manila and called his informal law school the “*Escuela de Leyes*.”
- 5 *Congressional Directory*, 75th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905): 129–130; Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 8–21; Zoilo M. Galang, ed., *Leaders of the Philippines: Inspiring Biographies of Successful Men and Women of the Philippines* (Manila, PI: National Publishing Company, 1932): 268–270.
- 6 *Congressional Directory*, 75th Cong., 1st sess.: 129–130; Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 22–36.
- 7 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 37.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 45–47.
- 10 H. W. Brands, *Bound To Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 149–155.
- 11 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 50–51.
- 12 Robert Aura Smith, “Roxas Fights Back at Manuel Quezon,” 27 August 1933, *New York Times*: E2; Estrellita T. Muhi, “The Philippine Legislature, 1916–1935,” in *Philippine Legislature: 100 Years*, ed. Cesar P. Pobre (Quezon City, PI: Philippine Historical Association, 2000): 136–137; Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 52–54.
- 13 Eugenio S. De Garcia, “The Man Quintin Paredes,” 5 September 1934, *Philippines Herald Mid-Week Magazine*: 3.
- 14 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 69–77.
- 15 Galang, *Leaders of the Philippines*: 270.
- 16 De Garcia, “The Man Quintin Paredes”: 18, 22.
- 17 Galang, *Leaders of the Philippines*: 270.
- 18 Stephen W. Stathis, *Landmark Legislation, 1774–2012*, 2nd. ed. (Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2014): 244; Richard T. Jose, “The National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth, the National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth, 1935–1946,” in *Philippine Legislature: 100 Years*, ed. Cesar P. Pobre (Quezon City, PI: Philippine Historical Association, 2000): 142–148.
- 19 Jose, “The National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth, the National Assembly of the Second Philippine Republic and the Congress of the Philippine Commonwealth, 1935–1946”: 148. See also Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 76–77.
- 20 Jose, “The National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth, the National Assembly of the Second Philippine Republic and the Congress of the Philippine Commonwealth, 1935–1946”: 148; Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 77; *Congressional Directory*, 75th Cong., 1st sess.: 130.
- 21 “Paredes Promises to be Faithful to New Trust,” 21 December 1935, *Philippines Herald*: 1.
- 22 “Free Trade with U.S. Must be Continued, Paredes States,” 10 January 1936, *Philippines Herald*: 3.
- 23 Erwin D. Canham, “New Philippines Delegate Finds Problems Facing Him,” 13 February 1936, *Christian Science Monitor*: 1.
- 24 “President Greets Philippine Official,” 14 February 1936, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 9; “Paredes Calls on President Roosevelt,” 14 February 1936, *Philippines Herald*: 1; “Parades Here to Plan Philippines’ Legation,” 14 February 1936, *Washington Post*: 1; “A Man in the News: Favorable Tariff Rates Sought for Philippines,” 6 May 1936, *Christian Science Monitor*: 6.
- 25 “A Man in the News: Favorable Tariff Rates Sought for Philippines.”
- 26 Canham, “New Philippines Delegate Finds Problems Facing Him”; “Monetary Issue Tangles Affairs of Philippines,” 15 February 1936, *Christian Science Monitor*: 1. See also “A Man in the News: Favorable Tariff Rates Sought for Philippines.”
- 27 “Asks Aid for Filipinos,” 27 January 1938, *New York Times*: 14.
- 28 “Filipinos to Lose Jobs With U.S., Paredes Says,” 12 February 1938, *Washington Post*: X2.
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- 30 “From Across the Sea,” 20 March 1936, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 16; Vicente Albano Pacis, “After the Ball,” 16 March 1936, *Washington Post*: 9; “Monetary Issue Tangles Affairs of Philippines.”
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- 32 *Philippine Currency Reserves*: 19–41.
- 33 Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, *Philippine Currency Reserve on Deposit in the United States*, 74th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Rept. 1702 (1936): 1, 3.
- 34 “Assails Philippine Bill,” 7 August 1937, *New York Times*: 13; *Congressional Record*, Senate, 74th Cong., 2nd sess. (18 May 1936): 7414–7419.
- 35 *Congressional Record*, House, 74th Cong., 2nd sess. (15 April 1936): 5526–5528. See also “Philippines Seek Modification of Coconut Oil Tax,” 15 April 1936, *Christian Science Monitor*: 6.



- 36 *Congressional Record*, House, 74th Cong., 2nd sess. (28 May 1936): 8215, 8217.
- 37 Hearings before a Special Subcommittee of the House Committee on Agriculture, *Sugar*, 75th Cong., 1st sess. (19 March 1937): 251.
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- 42 President Roosevelt sent the report of the Joint Preparatory Committee to Congress in late January 1939, four months after Paredes resigned from the House. See "Proposed Delay in Philippine Independence Up to Congress," 24 January 1939, *Christian Science Monitor*: 4; "Philippine Issue Faces Congress," 25 January 1939, *Atlanta Constitution*: 20; "Philippine Report," 25 January 1939, *Wall Street Journal*: 6.
- 43 *Congressional Record*, Extension of Remarks, 75th Cong., 1st sess. (18 August 1937): 2152.
- 44 "Reported Successor to Paredes en Route," 25 April 1938, *Washington Post*: X3; "Philippine Leader Sails for States," 25 April 1938, *Los Angeles Times*: 6; "Paredes to Leave Post Here to Seek Seat in Assembly," 8 September 1938, *Washington Post*: X9.
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- 47 "M'Arthur Frees 7,000 Civilians in Luzon Drive," 18 April 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 5; "Six Members of Filipino Puppet Cabinet Seized," 23 April 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 5; "Foreign News Briefs: Filipinos Indicted," 15 March 1946, *Los Angeles Times*: 5.
- 48 "Poll Nearly Conceded," 26 April 1946, *Christian Science Monitor*: 7.
- 49 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 95–101.
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- 51 Paredes-San Diego, *Don Quintin of Abra*: 83–93, 95–101.
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