

Testimony to the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee

**SB 1509 Provides that Oregon Route 35 shall also be known as Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Historic Highway.**

Position: **Favorable**

February 3, 2022

Senator Manning, Chair

Senate Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee

CC: Honorable Members of the Senate Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee

My name is John Lee, and I am a military veteran with 20 years of service with the United States Army. I am a resident of Brownsville, Oregon, and submit this testimony as the Legislative Commission Chair representing The American Legion, Department of Oregon representing 113 posts with over 12,830 members.

I also serve as The American Legion Department of Oregon Legislative Commission Chair and I am on the American Legion national legislative council.

**The American Legion, Department of Oregon strongly supports SB 1509.**

The Oregon House of Representative passed Joint Memorial No. 9 on Feb. 28, 1945, calling on President Roosevelt to prevent the return of Japanese Americans "for the duration of the present war with Japan".

In 2011 our nation's Nisei soldiers were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal and in 2015 the French Legion d'Honneur award, the highest award the French Government could bestow on members of the American Armed Forces. In June 2021 the United States Postal Service released a Forever Stamp to pay tribute to Nisei soldiers.

Hood River citizens including American Legion Post 22 have since recognized Nisei World War II veterans in an "acknowledgement of wrongs" by dedicating local landmarks: a memorial brick "in honor of all Nisei veterans" at Overlook Memorial Park on Veterans' Day 2001 and a marble monument inscribed with names of all Japanese American veterans at Idlewilde Cemetery on Memorial Day 2011.

Three years after the end of World War II, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 committing the Federal Government to integrate the segregated military after 170 years of discrimination.

The United States Congress compelled the U.S. Army to award Medals of Honor to WWII Asian American and Philippine Islander veterans who performed deeds of valor equal to their white counterparts and who had been excluded from that highest military combat award due to discriminatory practices. Sixty years after World War II began, twenty-two Asian-Pacific veterans (including twenty Nisei) received Medal of Honor awards on June 21, 2000.

State Route 35 has special significance for Japanese American veterans, as many of their families owned or worked on fruit orchards along the highway and in the region until they were forcibly removed due to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066.

S.R. 35 is 41 miles in length and connects with the POW/MIA Memorial Highway on U.S. Highway 26 and with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway in Hood River on Interstate 84. Oregon has designated 8 border to border war veterans highways but has not designated a highway to honor Oregon's World War II Nisei veterans.

Designating S.R. 35 as the Oregon Nisei Veterans WWII Historic Highway will at long last pay tribute to Nisei veterans not only in the Columbia Gorge area but all 120 Nisei who served from the State of Oregon.

**On behalf of The American Legion, Department of Oregon and our state's Veterans, the Legion urges the committee to support SB 1509 and the honor it will bring to our Japanese American Veterans.**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide The American Legion, Department of Oregon, position on this important legislative issue.

John Lee  
The American Legion, Department of Oregon  
Legislative Commission Chair