

Submitter: Linda Tamura

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Management

Measure: SB1509

Dear Chair Grayber & Distinguished Committee Members:

We can learn from our past and move forward – together.

I'm a life-long teacher who was a young adult when I discovered that events in our country's past had a serious impact on my family, my hometown and our country.

Now I know that my dad, Harry Tamura, volunteered to serve in our country's armed forces six days after Pearl Harbor was bombed. My uncle, Mamoru Noji, interrogated Japanese prisoners of war in the South Pacific and translated documents for our military. Both Dad and Uncle Mam served while my grandparents – and my mom - were among 120,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated in concentration camps on our own soil.

Thirty-three thousand second-generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) like my father and uncle served our country:

- Linguists in the Military Intelligence Service were considered “America's secret weapon.” They served on the front lines in every major campaign and battle in the Pacific. By war's end, they translated two million documents with more than 20 million pages and interrogated 14,000 Japanese prisoners.

- The 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) – segregated Nisei soldiers - became the most decorated unit in U.S military history for its size and length of service. They served valiantly in Europe, rescuing the Lost Battalion of Texans in the Vosges Mountains, liberating towns in France and breaking the Gothic Line in Italy.

- The 522nd Infantry Battalion, part of the 442nd RCT, shot heavy artillery from long-range howitzer cannons. They traveled more than a thousand miles through 40 towns in 60 days – chasing the retreating Germans and liberating one of 30 Dachau slave labor camps.

These soldiers served honorably even when our country turned its back on them and their families.

But after the war, they were not welcomed home. Names of sixteen Nisei GIs were blotted out from a Hood River honor roll of 1,600 locals who served in our country's armed forces. My hometown gained national notoriety from The New York Times and other national media, overseas veterans plus citizens across our country. Then more than 1,800 locals signed petitions stating “Japs are not wanted in Hood River.” And the Oregon House of Representatives passed Joint Memorial 9 on February 9,

1945 urging President Franklin D. Roosevelt to prevent the return of Japanese Americans.

No wonder my family and hometown community spoke in hushed tones about those days...

Today we're here to show that we can rise above our past.

In 1988 Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, apologizing for a "grave injustice." Four of our U.S. presidents were involved in taking action over fourteen years to make that happen.

In 2017 every Oregon lawmaker present during our 79th Legislative Assembly session voted for Senate Concurrent Resolution 14, recognizing a Day of Remembrance for the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066, which led to incarcerating Japanese Americans during World War II.

My hometown has taken action to "right" the past:

- Two Nisei veterans were selected grand marshals for the 2001 local 4th of July parade.

[Part 2 follows]