

Submitter: Mike Allegre

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Management

Measure: SB1509

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Meek and Lewis, and Committee members:

It's a humbling privilege to submit my testimony today in support of Oregon SB 1509. Thank you for the opportunity! As a retired military veteran and former resident of the Hood River valley who grew up near many neighbors of Japanese descent, these families were such a positive and wonderful part of our lives. Racial matters didn't enter our conversations or interactions. Their families remain good friends today.

As you know, the approval of SB 1509 will be a positive step to bring long overdue attention and honor to America's Nisei warriors of WWII, the sons of Japanese immigrants. As American-born citizens of Japanese descent, many Nisei were eager to serve their country, but due to discrimination, Nisei were not permitted to join the US military. These men had volunteered by the thousands after Pearl Harbor. Some were already serving. About a year after their internment began, President Roosevelt reversed this policy and authorized the enlistment of Japanese Americans in 1943. They'd soon serve in a segregated regiment to fight in some of the bloodiest battles of WWII.

Nisei soldiers of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) are the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the US military. In addition to Nisei serving in North Africa and Italy, Japanese Americans fought in the Pacific Theater by serving as interpreters and translators against the Japanese as part of the Military Intelligence Service.

These brave Japanese American soldiers are often overlooked or discounted in WWII history. Despite the discrimination they met at home and on the battlefield, Nisei soldiers proved to America their worth and loyalty. While many recognized the effort and sacrifice of Japanese Americans in both theaters of war, these soldiers were not acknowledged for their service and bravery for almost six decades after the war. The US finally recognized, 21 men from the 442nd – the Purple Heart Battalion - who were awarded the Medal of Honor.

Hood River County Nisei veterans were my neighbors, their families were our friends, their children remain some of my dearest friends. They've all enriched our lives by sharing friendship and their culture over these many decades. The stories of many of these Nisei veterans weren't told until Dr. Linda Tamura began researching and then publishing books chronicling their service and sacrifice. Finally, their stories were heard.

It took her nudging against the flow of traditional Japanese culture to get family

members and these veterans to talk about their experiences during the 1940s and beyond. It was in the past, but it hadn't been recorded as history. Linda did that.

Sadly, we learned several years ago that my grandpa Buckley was one of many Post 22 members who were initially against our neighbors being recognized on that wall as veterans serving in WWII. A post-war change of heart led Gene Buckley to realize he was wrong. After the war my grandpa became Oregon's Legion District 5 commander. He campaigned for all Japanese American veterans to be allowed to join the American Legion and soon stood alongside these men and ensured his neighbors and other Nisei were properly honored and recognized for their service.

It's been said that rarely has our nation been so well served by a people that it has so ill-treated. Nisei veterans feel that for them to have done any less in service to the US, or in battle would've dishonored their families and their country. By renaming State highway 35, those who drive it will be forever reminded to remember the uncommonly brave, dedicated, and unselfish Japanese American veterans of Oregon – men who haven't ever asked for recognition. We want to keep their history and memories alive for all generations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting SB 1509.
Mike Allegre, Major (Ret), OR Air National Guard