

Minoru Yasui Day Bill: HB 4009

House Rural Communities Committee

Hearing Room C

Monday, February 1, 2016

Good Morning Chairman Clem and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Samuel D. Henry, Ed. D.; for 24-years I have been a resident of Troutdale, Oregon. I am currently employed as a faculty member at Portland State University: I serve as an associate professor of education, in the Graduate School of Education, and as interim director of the newly formed School of Gender, Race and Indigenous Nations. Although, I also currently serve on the Oregon State Board of Education, and work at PSU; I am not representing their official views with this testimony.

I am honored to share testimony with these esteemed colleagues for passage of HR4009: The Establishment of Minoru Yasui Day, as a way to commemorate the community-based, human, and civil rights legacy of an outstanding Oregonian and American pioneer. While this Bill seeks to establish March 28th as Minoru Yasui Day in the State of Oregon, we note that his recognition has already included the award of the 2015 US Presidential Medal of Freedom, and commemorations in Colorado, for him--our Native Son from Hood River. Today, we wish to provide three contexts for the Bill: 1) the leadership of one of Oregon's most vital communities, 2) support for the on-going struggle for equal rights and social justice in our country, and 3) an increased need and urgency for the education of our school children and our higher education consumers.

Vital Communities in Hood River

In an academic presentation at a conference in Stockholm in 2011, I described the Hood River Commission on Children and Families on behalf of their work mobilizing leadership and community action. At the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, we had recognized the tremendous community energy at work reducing the school drop-out rate, providing better and more comprehensive health care, and increasing school attendance for Latino students. On several occasions, I have driven into the Gorge to visit sites where community work took place. Hood River has also been the place where support for the Minoru Yasui museum has led to neighbors working with each other to build the area's *'social capital'*-a phrase and condition described as enhancing the valuable reciprocal relationships and building a sense of common purpose and communal achievement. The designation of Minoru Yasui Day is a tremendous opportunity to enhance the building of positive community values, including racial harmony, and the community-supported view that all cultures and races are accepted and valued. Your action on Yasui Day will have such a positive effect in the Hood River Community.

The Struggle for Social Justice

My own journey of 68 years has mileposts in the quest for educational equity, diversity and social justice ingrained in its fabric. This journey has led me to study culture contact in educational organizations in order to receive my doctorate at Columbia University; then work on school desegregation for the federal government, and diversity with state college campuses. I have seen much including angry neighbors throwing bricks and bottles at Black kids getting off the school bus in Boston— realizing that our society was not nearly as benevolent as my white colleagues believed it to be. Later when I moved West, I heard: first-hand about some of what went on in the

detention camps: I worked with a woman whose older brother committed suicide in a camp in Utah; and I also met with Congressman Minetta—through his leadership coming to a fuller understanding of what working for social justice is.

Yet, my own diversity journey is a sidebar to the story of the man we are here to remember and celebrate today. In this particularly dismal period of US history, the people and government of the US became suspicious of persons who were foreign-born and their children. Ordinary citizens were put on federal and local watch lists, while refugees trying to escape certain death were turned away from our shores. Our neighbors, or their parents or grandparents, were arrested, detained and their property was impounded and stolen; while they were imprisoned and put into isolated facilities hundreds of miles from their homes. Some persisted throughout the years of detention, others were emotionally and spiritually crushed, some lost hope and committed suicide. Yet, through the example and work of Minoru Masui and others, we begin to understand what social justice is. Comprehension is one of the reasons must come to know our own history.

An Urgency in Education

Even as we value our land of birth and the democratic society we strive to improve, we know that; that until we remember and preserve our stories, until we study and understand the realities of the decisions we make, and until we become educated and educate our school children and university students, the gestures of our freedoms stand as empty responses. As a former member of the US Armed Services, I know that putting my life on the line in defense of our country, at that time, also requires us to preserve the freedoms, remember our short-comings and learn from our history when the records of the time were kept silent.

Last December, the Oregon State Board of Education in conjunction with ODE recognized the work of Hood River Valley middle school teacher: Ms. Sarah Segal, naming her to become Oregon History Teacher of the Year 2015. Her work with her students, community and Yasui family members helps us provide a better platform in education. We cherish her teaching and local social studies fieldwork in the recognition of an education moving towards social justice, and in healing in our communities. Passage of HB4009 will help us as through education, we hold our collective consciences in our own hands, through active remembering and positive learning.

Conclusion

Your support and passage of HB 4009 will help provide three contexts: 1) continuing the story of one of Oregon's most vital communities, 2) supporting the on-going struggle for equal rights and social justice in our country, and 3) increasing the urgency for education in our schools and for higher education consumers. We strongly urge the Bill's passage, and I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you.