



SENATOR CHUCK THOMSEN
900 Court St NE, S-316
Salem, OR 97306

Chuck Thomsen Testimony, 2/1/2016

To The House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water:

Growing up in Hood River, the evidence and aftermath of World War II Japanese-American internment camps was all around us. Our community was impacted disproportionately. While every American knows of the injustice, I with my friends and neighbors, either lived it – or were very close to it.

Minoru Yasui is a legend to us. We all know his name in Hood River. And we are proud of it. Even before the Presidential Medal of Freedom was posthumously awarded to him.

Established in 1963 by President John Kennedy, the Presidential Medal of Freedom is our country's highest civilian award. It is awarded to individuals "who have made an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interest of the United States, world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." Mr. Yasui is the first Oregonian to receive the Medal of Freedom.

Born in Hood River in 1916, Minoru Yasui was the first Japanese-American to graduate from the University of Oregon School of Law and the first to become a member of the Oregon State Bar. He made national history in 1942, when he challenged the constitutionality of a military curfew ordered during World War II on the grounds of racial discrimination. He walked the streets of Portland to intentionally violate the curfew, which eventually led to his spending nine months in solitary confinement in the Multnomah County Jail. He would subsequently be sent to an internment camp in Idaho, where he remained incarcerated until mid-1944. He would go on to serve as Chair of the Japanese-American Citizens League Committee on the wrongful imprisonment of Japanese-Americans in World War II.

Minoru Yasui passed away in 1986, and he's buried in Hood River beneath a pair of giant cedars. He once said, "If we believe in America, if we believe in equality and democracy, if we believe in law and justice, then each of us, when we see or believe errors are being made, has an obligation to make every effort to correct them."

In order to share Minoru's legacy with all Oregonians, the Oregon Historical Society is displaying the Presidential Medal of Freedom here at the State Capitol today, and at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland from February 2-February 19. We are honored to be joined today by 14 members of the Yasui Family—11 of whom reside in Hood River.