

Submitter: Debbie Whitecotton

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Measure: SB1509

My name is Debbie Okimoto Whitecotton and my father was Yukimori Harold Okimoto, He served in WWII as 1st Sgt. in the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion ( C Battery) attached to the 442nd Infantry Battalion. He was in Europe serving our nation while his wife and her parents were evacuated from Hood River, OR to internment camps (Pinedale, CA May 1942, left July 1942 for Tule Lake, CA and after given loyalty tests, were transferred to Minidoka, Idaho from September 1943- April 1945. ) When they returned to the Hood River valley they faced prejudice and discrimination but thankfully, there were individuals who were kind and supportive of their return. The Nisei soldiers situations and their experiences are something that I personally have become more interested in learning about. I'm especially grateful for Linda Tamara's research and the oral history she has been able to gather. Especially since Nisei veterans were hesitant to share their experiences. I know personally that my parents did not speak of the internment. It was a senior in HS when my history teacher who asked if my parents were interned. Even when I went home to ask my Mom, she didn't want to discuss it. Senate Bill 1509 being submitted by Sen. Chuck Thomsen would be such an honor most deserving of ALL Oregon Nisei WWII veterans who served our nation under such troubling circumstances. I only wish my father and mother were alive to see this Senate Bill (hopefully) pass and Highway 35 designated as Oregon Nisei WWII memorial highway. This recognition for a generation of men who proudly served their country and gave their lives, would be a most honorable tribute. Having grown up in the Hood River Valley, it is especially meaningful to possibly have the opportunity to see the signs along a stretch of highway that was and continues to be traveled on by many of the families that this bill will honor. On behalf on my father's service and ALL the Oregon Nisei veterans and their families, I thank you for taking my testimony and hoping Senate Bill 1509 will pass.