

Bend Heroes Foundation
1900 NE 3rd St. Ste 106, #205
Bend, OR 97701

February 2, 2022

Public Hearing SB 1509 Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness; Feb. 3, 2022

Dear Senator Manning and distinguished Committee members:

I am Dick Tobiason, Chairman of the nonprofit Bend Heroes Foundation. I thank this and previous Committees for supporting my requests over the last 13 years to designate 8 veterans highways across Oregon. I have submitted a fact sheet on those highways for the record.

Please accept my deep appreciation for Senator Thomsen sponsoring SB 1509 and this Committee for holding this hearing.

As a co requestor of SB 1509 and a combat veteran, it is my honor to testify in support of SB 1509. If enacted into law, SB 1509 will at long last honor Oregon's WWII Nisei veterans who bravely fought with distinction for our nation during WWII by designating Oregon SR 35 as "**Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Memorial Highway**". That 41 mile scenic highway connects with the POW/MIA Memorial Highway on US Hwy 26 and Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway on I-84.

The Nisei veterans were bravely fighting for our precious freedoms while their families were imprisoned in concentration camps in terrible conditions far away from home and family by our own government.

On returning home after war, these veterans were ill-treated by their communities, a local veterans group and the Oregon Legislature. Events over the years have belatedly helped right those wrongs and they will be described in detail by my teammates Dr. Linda Tamura and Eric Ballinger.

It is past time to right those wrongs by enacting SB 1509 into law so the few remaining Nisei vets and families will know we honor them especially near the communities they left for war. They were proud to serve as Americans and prove their fidelity to our nation.

Because SB 790 failed to receive a vote by this Committee's counterpart House Committee in the last session, Eric Ballinger upon learning that called me to commiserate and asked me if designating a Nisei memorial highway on SR 35 was possible. Knowing how that could be done I responded it must be done and noted educator and historian Dr. Linda Tamura and American Legion Post 22 in Hood River must join us. Incidentally we honored Eric's Great Uncle Shige Imai a Nisei veteran from the Hood River Valley during one of our 15 Honor Flight trips to Washington, DC visiting their National WWII Memorial.

I requested ODOT to create a mockup of the highway sign and which we have submitted for the record. The highway signs along the 41 mile SR 35 will not only honor all of Oregon's Nisei veterans and preserve their memories but also help educate travelers on the extraordinary performance of these veterans when our nation experienced discrimination and prejudice in many forms both within the military services and society in general.

Over the last 7 decades since the end of WWII our military services and society have made great strides in advancing equality among formerly disadvantaged groups.

Thank you for this special opportunity during the "short session" to briefly comment on SB 1509.

I urge this Committee to vote unanimously in favor of SB 1509 with a “Do Pass” recommendation

I hope to see you at sign dedication ceremonies soon.

I will try to respond to any questions you might have.

Respectfully submitted,

Dick Tobiason, Chairman
LTC US Army, Retired
22325 White Peaks Drive
Bend, OR 97702
dtobiason@bendcable.com