

Submitter: Charles Mitchell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Measure: SB1509

I frequently travel on Highway 35 and think of the Nisei heroes of WWII and their contribution to defending not only the United States, but also the Upper Valley. Ironically, many local white business people and farmers rejected this contribution, and sought to benefit by exploiting their absence and the incarceration of their families. The returning soldiers names were erased from the memory wall in Hood River. This was a deplorable act of racism.

In the late 60s my Gladstone High School principal, Patrick O'brien, a white guy, stood up for the Japanese people of the Upper Valley. He flew 25 plus bomber missions over Europe, but never talked about his heroism. He, however, intentionally and regularly shared his experiences of living in the Hood River Valley and how his Nisei neighbors never got full credit for their contributions during the war. This history was hidden, and without a narrator telling the story, students would have known nothing about this struggle. Later historians, including Linda Tamura, began sharing the story. It needs to be reinforced now before all the heroes still living are gone.

The point is: this graphic reminder will help Oregonians appreciate the contributions of this special group of American veterans. We need to remember the history of racism and sacrifice which played out during the war. Naming this scenic highway is one way to bring attention to the price the Nisei service men payed for their patriotism. It will provide a visual trigger for those who are prone to forget and obfuscate to learn more about the historical heritage of those who stood up for America, despite having their families sent to concentration camps. Signage and historical narratives can contribute to the ongoing need to acknowledge heroism and teach the young about our Oregon heritage which is complex and worth knowing.

The cost of this project is minimal. The benefits are potentially great. I support the proposed legislation.