

Submitter: Mike Allegre

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Measure: SB1509

Testimony for OR SB 1509, Oregon Nisei Veterans WWII Memorial Highway
Feb. 3, 2022

Chair Manning and Committee members:

It's a humbling privilege and a first for me to submit my testimony today in support of Oregon SB 1509. As a retired military veteran and former resident of the Hood River valley who grew up near many neighbors of Japanese descent, these families were such a positive and wonderful part of our lives. Any racial matters didn't enter our conversations or interactions.

The approval of SB 1509 will be a positive step to bring long overdue attention and honor to America's Nisei warriors of WWII, the sons of Japanese immigrants. As American-born citizens of Japanese descent, many Nisei were eager to serve their country, but due to discrimination, Nisei were not permitted to join the US military.

About a year after their internment began, President Roosevelt reversed this policy and authorized the enlistment of Japanese Americans in 1943. These men had volunteered by the thousands after Pearl Harbor. Some were already serving. They'd soon serve in a segregated regiment to fight in some of the bloodiest battles of WWII. Nisei soldiers of the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) are the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the US military. In addition to Nisei serving in North Africa and Italy, Japanese Americans fought in the Pacific Theater by serving as interpreters and translators against the Japanese as part of the Military Intelligence Service.

These brave Japanese American soldiers are often overlooked in WWII history. Despite the discrimination they met at home and on the battlefield, Nisei soldiers proved to America their worth and loyalty. While many recognized the effort and sacrifice of Japanese Americans in both theaters of war, these soldiers were not acknowledged for their service and bravery for almost six decades after the war. When they were finally recognized, 20 men from the 442nd – the Purple Heart Battalion - were awarded the Medal of Honor.

These Hood River County Nisei veterans were my neighbors, their families were our friends, their children are some of my dearest friends. They've all enriched our lives by sharing friendship and their culture over these many decades. The stories of these Nisei veterans weren't told until Dr. Linda Tamura began publishing books chronicling their service and sacrifice. Finally, their stories were heard.

By renaming State highway 35, those who drive it will be forever reminded to recognize and salute the uncommonly brave, dedicated, and unselfish Japanese American veterans of Oregon – men who haven't ever asked for recognition. Like Dr. Tamura, we want to keep their history and memories alive for generations. Most of these men have passed on. We will help to honor their service and memories by naming this highway in their honor. As a veteran, it's my sincere hope that you'll approve SB 1509 and send it to the governor's desk for her signature in 2022.

Rarely has our nation been so well served by a people that it has so ill-treated. Nisei veterans feel that for them to have done any less in service to the US, or in battle would've dishonored their families and their country.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony and lend my heartfelt support to honoring Oregon's Nisei veterans in support of SB 1509.

Respectfully yours,

(signed)

Mike Allegre, Major (Ret.)
Oregon Air National Guard
Turner, OR