

Members of the House Committee on Veterans & Emergency Preparedness

Dear Chair Grayber and Committee Members:

It is with both deep humility and pride for their bravery, perseverance, and heroism that I submit this testimony supporting the dedication of Hwy 35 as the Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Memorial Highway. I have lived in Oregon since 1989, except during 1994-96 when I returned to Hawai'i as the Clinical Psychologist working with Korean, WWII, and Vietnam veterans in the inpatient Pacific Center VAMROC: Post Traumatic Stress Residential Rehabilitation Program. Personally, I have two uncles from Hawai'i who served in the U.S. Army during WWII: Kaoru Fukuyama in the segregated 100th Battalion and was KIA in Italy and Kwanji Fukuyama in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

The experiences of the Japanese Americans in Hawai'i and Oregon were significantly different, especially because of the racism expressed in Oregon by politicians, business and community members who supported the forced relocation to the Assembly Center (former Livestock Exhibition Bldg), concentration camps, or sent to field labor in Eastern Oregon. In 2009, OSU in their graduation ceremony awarded the Japanese American students (who had to leave campus) with honorary degrees. It was a privilege for me to contact the former Japanese American students who had been picked up and escorted by armed military personnel to Portland. The most outrageous and egregious example of racism by Oregonians occurred on November 29, 1944 when the American Legion Post No. 22 in Hood River removed the names of 16 Nisei soldiers from their war memorial. Furthermore, they protested Nisei serving in the U.S. military; proposed a Constitutional amendment to deny citizenship to Japanese Americans, and wanted to prevent Japanese Americans from returning to Hood River.

These racist examples against the majority of Japanese Americans and the Nisei WWII soldiers in Oregon did not happen in Hawai'i. Quite the contrary, growing up there the "GO for Broke" battle cry, their valor, and bravery was ever present in school curriculum, celebrations, programs and media honoring them. My family's regular visits to Punchbowl-the National Cemetery of the Pacific, e.g., Memorial day-American flags on each grave-placing flowers on my uncle Kaoru's grave and on those of other soldiers who were from his hometown of Kohala. They have not been forgotten in Hawai'i. During the years I have lived in Oregon, I have to say "rarely or never" have I seen an article in the news, etc. about the Oregon Nisei WWII veterans..

The 442nd soldiers were the first to liberate a subcamp of Dachau, the German concentration camp, however, there are no pictures that document that event. It might be understandable given that Japanese American soldiers liberated a German concentration camp while in fact their families and other Japanese Americans were in American concentration camps. Similarly, however, the Chinese who made significant contributions toward the building of the transcontinental railroad are not in the photo when the last golden spike was pounded. American history's continual exclusion of Asian Americans contributes toward the belief that we are perpetual foreigners who have not contributed to the building, defending, nor success of America, that we take jobs away from white/European American, and that we should go back. I experienced this when I was on the Michigan Governor's Advisory Commission on Asian

American Affairs and was featured on a PBS talk show when the Detroit automobile industry was blaming their problems on Japan. I reported that twelve members of my mother's family have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. I calmly stated that most Americans do not know or acknowledge the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to the U.S. military. The program included a phone-in segment and a caller stated, "if you are so angry why don;t you go back"...I know he meant that I was not American and should go back to another country. My reply was..." I was born in Hawaii which is a part of the United States and where do you want me to go back to?."

The 100th Infantry Battalion incorporated into the 442nd Regimental Combat Team continues to be the most decorated American unit for its size and length of service. It was difficult to understand how only one Japanese American had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Upon review, it was found that Japanese American soldiers had been nominated for the highest award and then downgraded. It is reprehensible that heroic Japanese Americans were subjected to racism. This was rectified when in 2001 President Clinton awarded 22 Japanese American soldiers the Congressional Medal of Honor for actions during WWII. In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded collectively to the U.S. Army 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their dedicated service in Europe and the Military Information Services in Europe and the Pacific. Japanese American WWII veterans impacted by racism have been slowly recognized nationally.

Your passing of this legislation will undoubtedly show that Oregon is attempting to acknowledge and make amends for actions against the Oregon Japanese Americans and the Nisei veterans. Your actions will recognize and ensure that the contributions of WWII Oregon Nisei veterans will not be forgotten.

Aloha
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