



September 18, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: MEDAL OF FREEDOM NOMINATION FOR MIN YASUI AND MITSUYE ENDO

Dear Mr. President:

The undersigned National Council of Asian Pacific American (NCAPA) organizations support the selection of Minoru “Min” Yasui and Mitsuye Endo as awardees for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Minoru “Min” Yasui was born in Hood River, Oregon, in 1916, and later became the first Japanese American attorney in the state of Oregon. He was arrested for challenging military orders that led to the incarceration of 110,000 Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor. On June 21, 1943, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Yasui v. United States* that the U.S. government did have the right to restrict the lives of American citizens during times of war. After the war, Yasui moved to Denver, Colorado, where he was a founding member of many community organizations such as the Urban League of Denver, the Latin American Research and Service Agency, and Denver Native Americans United. Yasui’s cross-cultural advocacy led to his appointment to Denver’s Community Relations Commission (later renamed the Denver Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships). After serving as Commissioner, Vice-Chair, and Chair of the Commission, Yasui was appointed as the Commission’s Executive Director in 1967 by the mayor of Denver, and is credited with preventing race riots in the city during the late 1960s. In the 1980s, Yasui chaired the National JACL Committee for Redress, campaigning for an apology and reparations from the U.S. government for its actions during the Japanese American incarceration. In 1984, Yasui’s 1942 conviction was overturned by a federal district court through a writ of error (*coram nobis*) filed by Yasui and his lawyers in 1983.

Mitsuye Endo, an American citizen, was a clerical worker in the Sacramento office of the Department of Employment when the State of California summarily dismissed

all Japanese American state employees following the attack on Pearl Harbor. She was selected as a test case to file a writ of habeas corpus, and agreed to remain confined in a War Relocation Camp as a condition of her participation in the lawsuit. Endo's petition was heard in 1942, denied in 1943, and appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1944. In *Ex parte Endo*, decided on December 18, 1944, the justices ruled that she could not be confined indefinitely against her will, leading to the eventual release of Japanese Americans across the nation.

Min Yasui is the only one of the three well-known legal challenges to the Japanese American incarceration during WWII (the others being Fred Korematsu and Gordon Hirabayashi) who has not been awarded the Medal of Freedom. Although the only legal challenger of the Japanese American incarceration before the U.S. Supreme Court who was victorious, Mitsuye Endo has also not been recognized for her heroic stance. Both Yasui and Endo's stories represent the best of American optimism, determination, and engagement, even in the face of injustice.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian American Psychological Association
Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership
Association is Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Center for Asian American Media
Center for Asian Pacific American Women
Laotian American National Alliance
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association of Asian American Professionals
National Coalition For Asian Pacific American Community Development
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates
South Asian Americans Leading Together