

February 26, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

Council of Korean Americans (CKA) is proud and honored to support the nomination of the late Colonel **Young Oak Kim** for this year's **Presidential Medal of Freedom**.

Young Oak Kim's extraordinary service in the United States Army and his compassion for the underprivileged and the marginalized embody CKA's values with regard to public service and social justice. Kim's legacy is a reminder to CKA members and the greater Asian American community that we can all become agents for positive change in society by lifting each other up.

As a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization comprised of top Korean American leaders, we were humbled to learn about Colonel Kim's accomplishments. Like many CKA members, Kim was a second-generation Korean American. At a young age, Kim joined the U.S. Army and quickly rose within the ranks, eventually leading the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team against the Nazis in Italy and France during World War II. Kim was the only Korean American among the 20,000 Japanese American soldiers who served during World War II. His tactical brilliance, photographic memory, and willingness to lay his life on the line for his men quickly won him respect from the all-Japanese American unit as well as countless awards from the United States Defense Department and countries abroad.

Yet what instilled loyalty and trust among Colonel Kim's subordinates above all else was his deep conviction that all Americans were created equal. When asked if he wanted to transfer to another unit due to tensions between Japanese and Korean Americans during what was the height of Japanese colonial activities in Korea, Colonel Kim famously said: "They're Americans and I'm an American. We're going to fight for America, so I want to stay." We can learn from those words today, when racial divide remains an explosive force in far too many corners of the United States. Indeed, all of us would do well to heed Colonel Kim's words that America's diversity is our greatest strength and that racism threatens the very core of our identity.

Young Oak Kim was also a remarkable humanitarian. As commander of the 1st Battalion/31st Infantry Regiment during the Korean War, Kim led his battalion in adopting an orphanage of over 500 children. After retiring from the Army, Kim continued to help women and children, including female POWs and victims of domestic violence. One of the many community organizations that Kim supported after retiring

from military service was Every Woman's Shelter in the metropolitan Los Angeles area, which has served thousands of Asian and Pacific Islander women victimized by domestic abuse. Starting in the mid-1980s, Kim served as the shelter's chairman for ten years. As with all of his charitable work, Kim refused to take credit for his contributions and conducted his work as much as possible behind the scenes.

CKA's mission is to create a global network of Korean Americans dedicated to advancing issues of national importance for our community. Young Oak Kim is an inspiration to our members and to all Korean Americans who seek to dedicate their lives to something bigger than themselves. Kim's life teaches us that as Korean American leaders, we are called to use our skills and resources to give back to our community and be role models for the next generation. His life story reminds us that we can fight racial discrimination and social injustice through both defiance and compassion. And he has shown us that the most impressive accomplishments in life may not be heroic acts in battle but what we do to help the weakest and the most disenfranchised among us in our daily lives.

We look forward to commemorating Young Oak Kim's exceptional contributions to this nation through the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Sam Yoon
Executive Director
Council of Korean Americans