



DAVID E. RYU
COUNCILMEMBER, FOURTH DISTRICT

March 1, 2016

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

RE: 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom

Dear President Obama:

I am honored to support the nomination of the late Colonel Young Oak Kim for the 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom. His heroic service in the United States Army and his dedicated civic leadership in underserved communities deem him a meritorious American citizen.

As the first Korean American Councilmember in the City of Los Angeles, I understand the significance of remembering where I came⁴ from and the struggles of the Korean-American community when they first arrived in America. I was blessed and honored to have met Colonel Kim before his passing. His bravery and leadership only propelled me to further help our community and eventually gave me the courage to run for office and be in the position today.

Born in 1919 to immigrant parents, Colonel Young Oak Kim was a valiant Korean American war hero who fought for the United States Army during World War II and the Korean War. After his retirement from an exemplary military career in 1972, he dedicated his life to public service and developed several major non-profit organizations in throughout Southern California.

As a loyal American patriot, Young Oak Kim served as the only Korean American in the famous Japanese American unit, the 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team, during World War II. The Army offered him a transfer due to fears of ethnic conflict, but he refused, declaring, "There is no Japanese nor Korean here. We're all Americans and we're fighting for the same cause." This sentiment underscored Kim's character, having the valor of a warrior and the heart of a humanitarian.

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Throughout his military career, Young Oak Kim earned several awards, including the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery during a “suicide mission,” but remained a humble global citizen. He re-enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and fought on the front lines rather than becoming a translator. During that time, he became the first minority officer in U.S. history to command an Army battalion on the battlefield. In Seoul, Korea, he led his battalion in adopting an orphanage of over 500 children, who grew up to be successful innovators and leaders in the workforce.

After retiring from the military in 1972, Young Oak Kim devoted the rest of his life to serving minorities, youth, the elderly, and the poor in his hometown of Los Angeles. He founded numerous non-profit organizations in Southern California, including the Korean American Museum; the Korean American Coalition; and the Korean Health, Education, Information and Research Center.

When he was on the board of the United Way Asian Center, he added its programs for Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean Americans. Kim was also chairman of the Center for Asian Pacific Families, which, under his leadership, became the largest women’s shelter in Southern California in the 1990s. He was also dedicated to honoring the contributions of the Japanese Americans who served alongside him during World War II, and he helped establish the Japanese American national Museum, the Go For Broke Monument, and Go For Broke Educational Foundation.

Kim passed away in 2005, but his legacy lives on through the lives he saved during his service in the U.S. Army and the humanitarian work of his organizations that allows future generations to prosper. Because of his exemplary lifetime of service on behalf of all Americans, Young Oak Kim is a worthy candidate for the highest civilian award in the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Respectfully,



David E. Ryu
Councilmember
Fourth District