

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2016

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

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 leadership in underserved communities deem him a meritorious American citizen.

I have been proud to represent the 7th District of Washington State for 28 years. One of the enduring features of Seattle is its vibrant and diverse community, including an active and engaged Korean-American population. My Korean friends in the District have often talked about the legendary Colonel Young Oak Kim, and I'm delighted to see his name put forth as a Presidential Medal of Freedom nominee.

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.

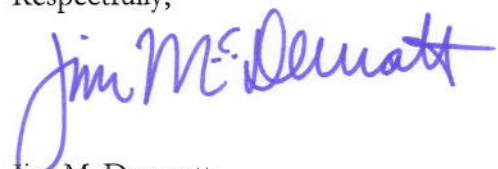
Throughout his military career, Young Oak Kim earned several awards, including the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery during a "suicide mission," but remained a humble global citizen. He re-enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and fought on the front lines rather than becoming 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim McDermott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" and last name "McDermott" clearly legible.

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress