

MICHAEL F. BENNET
COLORADO



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510

December 18, 2014

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

Dear Mr. President:

I am proud and honored to support the nomination of Minoru Yasui for a 2015 Presidential Medal of Freedom. Mr. Yasui dedicated his life to defending civil and human rights, and I believe he is an ideal candidate to receive this highest honor.

Minoru Yasui's commitment to civil and human rights was most dramatically demonstrated when he intentionally violated the military curfew imposed upon American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II. Mr. Yasui's thoughtful challenge to the curfew started with him asking an officer on the street to arrest him. The officer refused so he walked into the police station. Later, on bail, he learned that a grand jury had indicted him. After the notice was given for the Japanese to evacuate, Mr. Yasui notified the authorities that he had no intention of complying, and went to his family's home in Hood River. This violated another law restricting travel of Japanese Americans, and authorities arrested him.

Mr. Yasui tested the legality of these orders and was sentenced to one year in prison and fined. He waited for his chance to appeal while incarcerated. He pursued his case to the Supreme Court where the judges concluded that Yasui was still a U.S. citizen. However, on June 21, 1943, in *Yasui v. United States*, the court ruled unanimously that the government did have the authority to enact the curfew during wartime. Yasui's case was sent back to the original trial court where the judge removed the fine and decided that the time already served was enough of a punishment. Yasui was released and moved into the Japanese internment camps.

Mr. Yasui never gave up in his pursuit for justice. Although he lost his case in wartime, he petitioned 40 years later for a writ of *coram nobis*. He stated that government officials had altered and destroyed evidence relating to the loyalty of Japanese Americans and had failed to advise the Supreme Court of the falsity of allegations in a seminal military report. Mr. Yasui died while the case that would have cleared his name was pending.

Mr. Yasui stands out as a shining beacon of someone who never lost faith in our legal system. His passionate faith in the American system of justice is epitomized by a statement he wrote the night before his sentencing and delivered to the court prior to being sentenced. He wrote:

"I am compelled to pay tribute and give my unreserved respect to this honorable court for its clear-cut and courageous reaffirmation of the inviolability of the fundamental civil rights and liberties of an American citizen. As an American citizen, it was for a clarification and the preservation of those rights that I undertook this case, confident that the American judiciary would zealously defend those rights, war or no war, in order to preserve the fundamental democratic doctrines of our nation and to perpetuate the eternal truths of America. . . I believe in the future and in the ultimate destiny of America. Ever since I was a child, I have been inculcated in the basic concepts and the traditions of those great patriots who founded our nation".

After this courageous act, Mr. Yasui was never silenced by fear or bitterness. He fought for the rights of all people who at one time or another suffered oppression or underrepresentation. A visionary well ahead of his time, Mr. Yasui recognized the common struggle of all marginalized people and dedicated his life to advocate and achieve results on their behalf.

Mr. Yasui's lifelong work of advocating and gaining results for civil and human rights spans over five decades, from 1931 – when at the age of 15 he helped to organize a chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League – until his death in 1986. Mr. Yasui's work ranged from helping to found the Urban League of Denver, the Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy & Research Organization and the Denver Indian Center. In addition, Mr. Yasui chaired the Denver Anti-Crime Council, the board of Employ-Ex (a program for ex-offenders), Denver Opportunity, a War on Poverty program and the Colorado State Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Mr. Yasui served as Executive Director of the Denver Commission on Community Relations. In addition, Mr. Yasui began various agencies, including the Commissions on Youth, Aging, Human Services, the Council on Disabled and the Office of Citizen Response. His commitment also included a focus on international human rights. He helped found and served as chair of the International Friendship Association, People-to-People, and served as a board member of the Colorado Council on International Organizations. He also was a member of the International Association of Human Rights Agencies. As a Scoutmaster for a multiracial Boy Scout troop, he mentored scouts through camping trips to the Rocky Mountains for over 15 years.

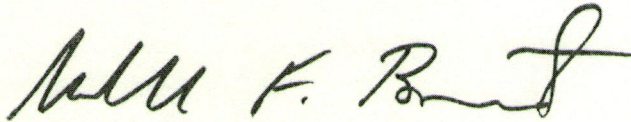
Mr. Yasui was also a champion for immigration and naturalization reform. He lobbied for passage of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which removed the prohibition on Japanese aliens applying for U.S. citizenship. After the act passed, Mr.

Yasui helped many elderly Japanese become U.S. citizens.

Minoru Yasui was decades ahead of his time and a true pioneer in the cross-racial and cultural fight for civil and human rights. His life is a model full of contributions to the United States, to world peace and to significant public endeavors.

For all that he achieved through his life's work that continues to inspire us today, Minoru Yasui is a highly worthy candidate for the 2015 Presidential Medal of Freedom. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a stylized "B".

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator