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Chinese American veterans honored at last



Photo courtesy of Ed Gor

The team that lobbied Congress, from left: Ed Gor, past national president of C.A.C.A., Wilson Lee, C.A.C.A. Boston Lodge, Kristin Lee, policy analyst, Sen. Debbie Stabenow (MI), Maj. Gen. (ret) Robert G.F. Lee, Chair of the CGM Design Committee, Cdr. (ret) USN, Evelyn Moy, USN (ret) Alexander Cha

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

The oldest Asian American civil rights organization in the country is spearheading an effort to award Chinese American World War II veterans and their families Congressional Gold Medals. It is a way to honor their devotion to a country that, at the time, discriminated against them and other Asian Americans.

The awarding of the medals, which required intense lobbying of Congress and which will take place in spring of next year, also comes at a time when many veterans in general are discouraged with their healthcare.

“When people get excited about the little things, they have the confidence to take on greater things,” said Ed Gor, former president of Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA), which was established in 1895.

Still, enabling Chinese American

veterans to receive Congressional Gold Medals is hardly a small matter.

While other Asian Pacific Islander groups have lobbied for and received medals, it took Gor years of keen observation, investigation, and lobbying to make it happen.

As president of CACA, from 2013 to 2017, he found that many Chinese American World War II veterans paid their dues, but did not come to meetings.

His own father was a World War II veteran, maintaining engines for P-40 airplanes used by the Flying Tigers that helped protect China, and he was curious.

He found that many aging veterans had joined CACA in the first place because they had been excluded at the time from joining the American Legion due to their race. Now even at their advanced age, they still worked long hours, 12 to 14 hours a day, as small business owners or grocers, and

see CACA on 16

Planned Parenthood president Leana Wen forced out after 8 months



Dr. Leana Wen

NEW YORK (AP) — Planned Parenthood’s president has been forced out of her job after only eight months as the organization faces unprecedented challenges related to its role as the leading abortion provider in the United States.

Dr. Leana Wen said in a statement posted on Twitter on July 16 that she had “philosophical differences” with the new chairs of Planned Parenthood’s board regarding abortion politics.

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API defenders of affirmative action try to persuade opponents

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Facing a referendum that could overturn a new affirmative action law, prominent Asian Pacific Islander (API) Democrats defended the law to the group of new Chinese immigrants that oppose it.

Affirmative action is a legal requirement to give marginalized groups encouragement and in some cases advantages in education and business to redress past and current discrimination and oppression in order to create a level playing field.

While the history of affirmative action is fraught with highly charged political struggle, today 61 percent of Americans support it, according to a recent Gallup poll.

Speaking at a briefing at China Harbor on July 10, former governor Gary Locke, state Rep. Sharon Tomiko

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Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos, former governor Gary Locke, and former Seattle City council member Martha Choe speak about I-1000.

Photo by Mahlon Meyer



Andy Chan and wife, Shang

Andy Chan dies Former owner of Sun Ya Restaurant

A memorial service will be held on July 21 for Andy Chan, who passed away on July 10.

Chan was born on October 27, 1946 in Toi Shan, Canton, China. He immigrated to Hong Kong, attended college in Alberta, Canada, and moved to the United States in the early 1970s.

Chan opened up a restaurant at Seatac Mall, called Peking Express in the late 1980s. He sold that business in 1995 and took over ownership of Sun Ya Seafood Restaurant in Seattle’s

Chinatown. That restaurant has since sold twice and is now known as Ocean Star.

He died on July 10, at the age of 72, surrounded by family and friends. He is survived by his wife and three children. A July 21 memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. in Sunset Hill Memorial Park and Funeral Home in Bellevue.

The following is a eulogy prepared by Chan’s daughter, Cynthia.

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couldn't come to meetings.

And yet during World War II, many of the veterans had shown unwavering devotion despite outright discrimination.

At the time, the United States had not yet lifted the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred many Chinese from becoming citizens.

In the United States, on the eve of the war, there were 100,000 Chinese Americans in the country. Out of those, nearly 20 percent, or 18,000, served in the military. And of those that served, 40 percent were not even citizens.

As president, Gor visited nearly every CACA lodge and chapter around the nation to muster support for the project.

"We had people making phone calls, writing letters to congress," he said.

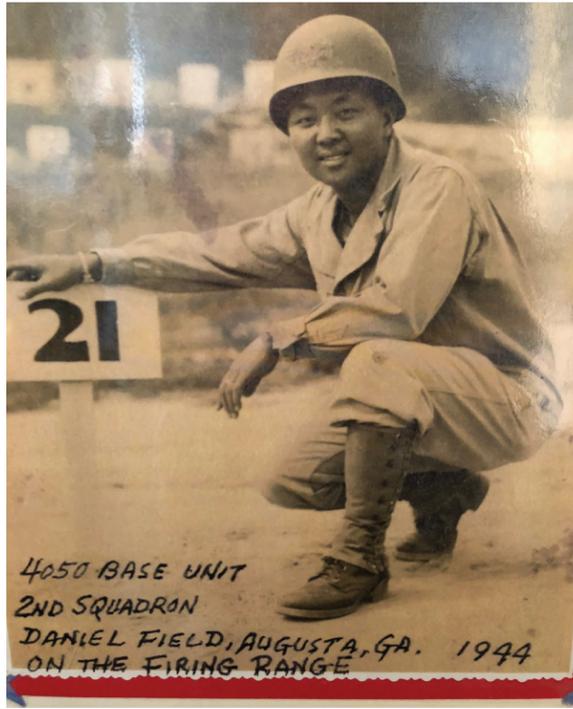
The turning point came when he enlisted several Chinese American generals who walked through the halls of Congress with him and other CACA activists, making both planned and surprise visits to legislators to push the bill that would grant the medals.

"These young staff members really perked up when these generals came in," he said.

The generals also helped artists design the picture that will be emblazoned on the medals.

The ceremony to award the medals, which will take place in Washington D.C. followed by a smaller one in Seattle for those too frail to make the trip, is also an acknowledgment at long last that the Chinese American veterans are deserving of equal honor.

"It is more symbolic than anything else," he said. "But it is a recognition by the U.S. that they dutifully and honorably served alongside everyone else, and this is lost among a lot of



Former CACA president Ed Gor's father, Joe Gor, serviced planes for the Flying Tigers

Photo courtesy of Ed Gor

people who didn't know the Chinese served."

Through its campaign, and with the help of the media, over 100 veterans or their family members have registered in Seattle, said Cathy Lee, president of the Seattle chapter of CACA. Two or three will make the trip to the capital for the national ceremony.

CACA has already raised \$50,000 towards its goal of half

a million to cover all costs, including purchasing a medal for each veteran — 3,000 in all — paying for travel and a color guard.

Although one national organization has agreed to pay for the first 1,000 medals, raising the rest is still a challenge.

"It will not be easy," said Gor.

Raising awareness for all veterans

Through their work, Gor also hopes to raise awareness about other issues facing veterans, such as healthcare coverage.

In recent years, veterans have been committing suicide at a rate one and a half more times the national average, according to a recent article by the New York Times. A spate of suicides has taken place in parking lots outside of the Department of Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals.

At the most recent CACA national convention, Gor invited members of the VA to brief members about how to navigate the system, oftentimes a cumbersome and byzantine process.

"We want to raise awareness and provide encouragement through this process," he said.

But the challenges are numerous. The VA hospital system has suffered from computer and staffing problems, and is now facing possible privatization under the Trump administration.

Major Weldon Lee, who assisted Japanese American veterans to get a high-ranking speaker for their ceremony to receive the Congressional Gold Medal, said he would be joining forces with CACA. ■

Families or veterans seeking more information can visit caww2.org or send an email to info@cacaseattle.org.

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I-1000 from 1

Santos, and former Seattle City Councilmember Martha Choe offered slightly varying rationales for I-1000, which was passed by the state legislature on April 28.

I-1000 overturned I-200, the state's 20-year-old, voter-approved ban on affirmative action.

While opposition to the law is by no means unanimous among new Chinese immigrants, a highly vocal and activist group, primarily from the Eastside, sees it as part of a failure by politicians to uphold their promises to fulfill the American dream. They see it as a betrayal of the principle of equal opportunity.

"It has shattered my clear expectation of American democracy," said Qiu Kan, president of American Coalition for Equality, which is gathering signatures for the referendum.

Locke sought to defuse the activists' fears that it will discriminate against Chinese Americans in higher education.

He argued that the emphasis of the law is to create more opportunities for minority businesses to gain government contracts by allowing the government to reach out and encourage them to apply.

Addressing the major concern of the activists, Locke also said that the state's schools are already admitting increasing number of marginalized students and so there will be no need for admissions officers, under the new law, to make major changes to their practices.

He said I-1000 merely allows schools to do outreach to those marginalized groups whose students might otherwise not be willing to apply to college.

"I was admitted to Yale University under an affirmative action program," he said. "I want to know that I am just as good as anyone else, but I am happy that Yale University sent people to all the Seattle public schools, urging the bright kids to apply. I had never even heard of Yale or Harvard until someone came to our school saying, 'you should apply.'"

I-200 banned any consideration of race, and schools were prohibited from even doing outreach, he said.

Rep. Santos said that many voters were confused by the language of the law when they voted for it, a claim supported by U.S. historian Terry H. Anderson, in his book, "The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action."

Locke said, that with the passage of I-1000, admissions officers could now consider multiple factors such as the hardship a student had faced, economic background, and ethnicity.

"Affirmative action is taking a hard look at people you might not otherwise consider," he added.

But the activists contend that legislators passed the law out of alarm at the growing number of international students from China in the state's schools.

They say that schools, in considering ethnicity, will lump together students coming directly from China with Chinese American students whose parents are naturalized

citizens.

They say this doesn't happen with white students.

"Imagine if colleges did not make a distinction between those Americans whose ancestors came from England centuries ago and the English students studying here now," said Qiu. "This law lumps all 'Chinese' together—that's racist."

During the marathon, 3-hour briefing, Locke stressed repeatedly that under I-1000, quotas were still abolished so that schools could not set a fixed number of Chinese students to admit.

However, Locke and the other defenders said that the new law would increase competition for limited spots in the state's universities.

"There's an attempt to divide and blame others if kids don't get admitted," said Choe, who has served in various political, philanthropic and educational offices. "Well, there isn't enough room today in universities for every qualified kid, that's a fact. And we can look and blame others for why that is, and it's unfortunate."

"I don't think you would be upset if more students from other communities applied and they had to compete against your kids," said Locke.

He repeatedly urged new immigrant Chinese parents to educate their kids in a "holistic" way, emphasizing not just test scores, but sports and social service, saying schools wanted "active" students.

"We have been working on raising kids that are socially active and make a contribution to society for more than a decade," said Lily Yin, a member of Little Masters Club, which promotes peer education and outreach activities to places like Mary's Place and Children's Hospital.

"We felt that this was an old view of us," she said.

After blank cards for questions were passed out to the audience, Santos responded to one about the difference between 'equity' and 'equality,' a longtime concern of many of the activists, who opposed equity programs in local K-12 school districts last year.

Santos compared 'equality' to a scenario in which she and her cronies had been playing Monopoly for five hours straight and bought up all the property. A newcomer, though getting equal cash, would be shut out from buying any property. 'Equity' would involve making compensations to allow a new player to have a fair stake in owning property.

Another question implied that the law was contravening the principles symbolized by the statue of blind justice.

"Let's not confuse things—blind justice is about the administration of justice," said Santos. "What we're talking about here, with Initiative 1000, deals more with the Statue of Liberty than blind justice, and what does the Statue of



Former Seattle City council member Martha Choe responds to a question about I-1000



Audience members listen to defenders of I-1000

Photos by Mahlon Meyer

Liberty offer? She stands there with a golden torch offering opportunity."

She then recited part of the poem inscribed on its base.

"That is what America stands for, opportunity for all people, not based on your pedigree, not based on who you know or who your parents are," she added.

Still another question was whether the law was partisan, to which Locke replied that both Republicans and Democrats supported it, citing former governor Dan Evans.

Qiu later said he found the answer "contradictory" since the vote to pass I-1000 was along party lines, with Democrats in support, and Republicans opposed.

The briefing was held in English with an interpreter translating into Mandarin Chinese.

Many activists seemed to be listening alternately to both languages.

But those in the front row leaned forward and stared raptly at Locke when, speaking now in a hoarse voice at the end of the evening, he told personal stories to illustrate that marginalized students might be dissuaded from applying to college by their families.

"My uncle was the very first Chinese admitted to the University of Washington Medical School," he said. "Grandpa had told my uncle, 'No, just get a job and be a cook,' but someone had reached out to my uncle and said 'No, you should have big dreams and apply.'"

Scholars argue that support for affirmative action programs like I-1000 reflects the current demographics of the United States.

"Given the growing diversity within the multi-racial and multi-ethnic population in the U.S., the finding that a majority of Americans generally support affirmative action programs is not surprising," said Henry Chow, a sociologist at the University of Regina, in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Activists have until July 23 to gather enough signatures to launch a referendum, which would be held in November.

Qiu said his supporters had visited public events and gone door to door.

"We are confident we will get enough signatures," he said. ■

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