

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



April X, 2021

The Honorable Don Young
2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dan Sullivan
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Members of the Alaskan Congressional Delegation,

We are writing to you today to bring to your attention a long-standing and significant oversight regarding the recognition of Hmong soldiers who served our country dutifully during the Vietnam War. As you may be aware, and as formally acknowledged by the United States government under the Clinton administration, many Hmong soldiers were recruited by the CIA in order to combat North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops under the direction of the Kennedy administration.

These troops were instrumental in disrupting the so-called "Ho Chih Minh Trail," a key logistics network connecting North and South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. These Hmong soldiers sacrificed their lives and faced reprisal from Communist regimes in order to ally with the United States during this war. Casualty rates for Hmong soldiers were ten times higher than other American troops, and thousands of Hmong civilians were also killed during the war. Many Hmong people were displaced as a result – moving to communities across America to seek asylum, including our districts in Anchorage, in order to flee political persecution.

However, the sacrifices of these heroes have gone largely unrecognized, leading to their popular designation as the United States' "Secret Army" during the Vietnam War. In fact, the entire Laotian theater of the Vietnam War is also colloquially referred to as the "Secret War," further underscoring the unsung nature of these soldiers' sacrifices.

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In recent years, efforts have been made to recognize these troops. As mentioned earlier, the Clinton administration signed the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, which removed certain barriers to naturalization for Hmong who fought on behalf of the United States between February 28, 1961 through September 18, 1978. The key provision under this legislation was to exempt these individuals from the English language portion of the citizenship test, as well as providing interpreters and lowering the threshold for passing other sections of the test. The 28th Alaska Legislature passed HCR 4, which designated May 15th as Hmong-American Veterans Memorial Day, and the Alaska Department of Motor Vehicles now provides veteran designations on driver's licenses for these Hmong soldiers.

However, these gestures, although symbolically important to those who put their lives on the line for our country, do not provide the material benefits that other veterans in our country currently enjoy. Additionally, the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 had strict limitations, capping the maximum number of applicants at 45,000 people and only providing an application window of 18 months after May 26, 2000.

There are still many Hmong elders who did not have the opportunity to apply for naturalization under this program but are still unable to read or write in English. In other words, many of these brave soldiers, including many Alaska residents, have yet to receive formal recognition or benefits for their military service and are unable to become citizens themselves. As time progresses, many of these soldiers are passing away without ever receiving those basic forms of acknowledgement. This is an injustice that must be rectified by the federal government before it is too late.

In summation, we are urging you to extend full veteran status to Hmong soldiers who served in the Vietnam War between February 28, 1961 through September 18, 1978, along with all of the legal benefits and privilege that status entails. We are also urging you to renew the provisions of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 in order to allow these soldiers to become naturalized citizens. These Hmong heroes risked their lives to save American troops during the Vietnam War and were forced to flee their homes because of their service to our country. The least we can do is acknowledge and honor their sacrifice.

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Sincerely,

Geran Tarr

Representative Geran Tarr

David Nelson

Representative David Nelson

Laddie Shaw

Representative Laddie Shaw

Chris Tuck

Representative Christopher Tuck

Matt Claman

Representative Matt Claman

Andi Story

Representative Andi Story

George Rauscher

Representative George Rauscher