

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
REPRESENTATIVE STEVE GREEN'S H.F. No. 2428
Updated April 3, 2021**

To: The Honorable Timothy Waltz, Minnesota Governor
The Honorable Melissa Hortman, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives
The Honorable Paul Gezelka, Minnesota State Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Leon Lillie, Chairman of the House Legacy Finance Committee
The Honorable Steve Green, Ranking Member of the House Legacy Finance Committee.
The Honorable Ruth Richardson, Ranking Member of the House Education Policy Committee
The Honorable Sondra Erickson, Ranking Member of the House Education Policy Committee
The Honorable Andrew Lang, Chairman of the Senate Veterans & Military Affairs Committee
The Honorable Rob Ecklund, Chairman of the House Veterans & Military Affairs Committee
The Honorable Larry Herke, Director of Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs
The Honorable Mary Cathryn Ricker, Commissioner of Minnesota Department of Education

From: Dr. Ha H. Tuong
Vietnam War Researcher, Lecturer and Author
Retired Vietnamese Community Activist, Minnesota
Retired High School Principal, Minneapolis Public Schools
Former Officer of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam

Date: March 30, 2021

First of all, I would like to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify in support of Representative Green's bill H.F. 2428 to appropriate funds to the Coalition of Allied Vietnam War Veterans. It is an honor to be working with you again. The Minnesota Legislature has been recognizing the contributions of heroes who have fought in the Vietnam War since the end of the war in late 1970s providing a safe asylum to refugees from South East Asia. This assistance covered all language groups, and not just the Vietnamese who were the largest group then.

Background

I was one of the educators who had secured federal and state funds to provide English as a Second Language and bilingual education in Minneapolis for approximately 800 Vietnamese, Laotian/Hmong and Cambodian (also Arabic and Persian) in grades 6-12 from 1977-1983 at five junior and senior high schools. The Hmong and Cambodian groups were the smallest; nevertheless, they were served adequately by the same staff allocation and curriculum. Our Limited English Proficiency program was one of the most successful in the country, and our materials, methodology, and model were shared to other states. It served everyone equally! In the early 1980s, I was one of Asian community representatives with Minnesota Governor when he signed into law the annual Asian Pacific Islanders 'Heritage Week which also created the Asian Pacific Islanders Council. Two Governor's Commendations were awarded to me for serving refugees and immigrants in both K-12 and Adult Basic Education.

I moved on to administrative position and continued to serve everyone fairly and equally, empowering the less privileged and promoting a higher education goal setting among students of color and different gender. We had a Hmong Homecoming King one year and a Cambodian one another year at Washburn High School. We had a Hmong dance troupe and a Kung Fu club (also Native Circle) at Folwell Middle School. I mentored three teachers who later became principals (one male, a Pilipino, and two female, an African American and a Hmong, the latter just passed away because of Covid19).

Minnesota recognizing the Southeast Asian immigrants

Earlier, after the State legislature passed the bill granting funds to erect the monument honoring the combatants in the Laos Secret War, Mr. Phuc Ngo, former Chair of the Fellowship of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, and I met with Ms. Sia Her before she became the Executive Director of the Council of Asian and Pacific Islanders of Minnesota (CAPMN), replacing Late Mr. Nhon who was the Boards Chairman, to see if we could get support for an joint US-RVN Monument grant equivalent to the one given to the Laos Secret War. I found out the Laos one was actually to honor just the Hmong Special Guerrilla Units. Many were made to believe that SGU units were all Hmong. This is now known to be false. All Military Regions in Laos during the war had sizable SGU units comprised mostly of Lowland Lao. They were often deployed to support stressed Hmong units in Military Region 2. Exaggerated claims have been made that “36,000 Hmong SGU soldiers died protecting 36,000 Americans troops. Additionally, known Hmong studies videos, oral history and interviews were published stating Hmong combatants fought along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Military Regions Military regions 3 and 4, zones that were off-limit to Gen. Vang Pao’s SGU (Region 2). There is no evidence of these accounts. The trail head of the Ho Chi Minh Trail crossed into Laos far below the Hmong territory much nearer the center of Military Region 3 where no Hmong were known to be deployed (Jane Hamilton-Merritt’s “Tragic Mountains” and CIA Thomas Briggs). Well circulated photos of Gen. Vang Pao who is shown with soldiers displaying fake Vietnam medals and United States purple hearts adds to these unsubstantiated claims. Much Hmong oral history in Minnesota with regard to the service and sacrifices in Laos during the war have been greatly exaggerated and have become greatly irritating to the other ethnic combatants. The contributions by the latter have been ignored and minimized while Hmong exploits are inflated. Along the same line, other SE Asian Vietnam War combatants living in Minnesota have been excluded from state educational standards requirement in order to elevate Hmong legacies.

My point, is not to brag about my role in making Minnesota a hospitable place for Southeast Asians, but to remind us all that public support is to be given equitably, not to any specific group, otherwise, it is institutional favoritism. I strongly believe that the members of the Minnesota legislature, as elected officials (including the Hmong legislators) should support and recognize all Southeast Asians and others ’sacrifice during the war with *monuments recognizing their veterans. Funding for special projects by nonprofit groups, education requirement standards, commemoration days, including the grant secured by the enactment of H.F. 127 which funded the Minnesota Remembers Vietnam Project which also promoted the Ken Burns Film, The Vietnam War should be shared. Omission of the Lao, Hmong and Khmer from this 12-episode film series was a grave mistake which humiliated so many Southeast Asians throughout the United States.* As a former Board member of the Coalition of Allied Vietnam War Veteran in 2017-2020, and as a socio-political Southeast Asian War researcher and author, I have testified on many occasions on CAVWV behalf in support for, not

just one or two groups, but all Americans, all allies and Southeast Asians who have sacrificed during the war.

The alarming observation

The confusing Vietnam War has affected not just Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia but the United States as well. Astonishingly, my research has found that most, if not all bills passed with regard to the Vietnam War and those who have emigrated to Minnesota and who are subjects of legislation since 2010 have been to support exclusively the Hmong community. One egregious example is the Hmong SGU Monument on the Capitol Complex grounds had been lead to believe that all Southeast Asian were honored only to learn that only Hmong were to be honored. Feeling betrayed by the legislature, Col. I. Khao complained furiously and after having paid money from his own pocket to the Monument Committee they gained weak mention AND regulated to the back of any celebrations or monument unveiling. Another example was a bill introduced that was passed to honor and commemorate the Hmong anniversary of May 15th, even though both Governors Dayton and Waltz had told the Southeast Asian veterans that no single-focus commemoration day would be given to any specific ethnic group while excluding others. Speaker Hortman even told a delegation of Lao Veterans from her district that she would not support any single-focus day. Yet legislation was introduced recognizing the Hmong only. Having heard of this legislation, all other ethnic veteran crafted language to honor each of them on separate days important to each. After meeting with House Chairman Ecklund of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee, nine other commemoration days were forwarded for consideration. Knowing what Speaker Hortman had told them, he still entertained that he might allow one or two other days to be heard and voted on by his committee. As a gesture of compromise and inclusion an All-inclusive American Allies Day Bill was introduced on behalf of CAVWV, however the Hmong would not support that legislation. Yet again I attended a meeting in Rep. Kaohly Her's office requested by Scott Walker, with Dr. Stephen Young and me, representing a delegation of first generation Southeast Asian Minnesotan educators (including Hmong Scholar Dr. Yang Dao) to discuss the introduction of legislation adding a Southeast Asian Social Studies curriculum Guidelines in Minnesota State public schools. Since Rep. Her sat on the House Education Committee and being of Southeast Asian decent, we thought she might be a good Chief Sponsor. That meeting got off to a poor start when Rep. Her immediately objected to the omission of Hmong content in the guidelines... "where is Hmong, where is Hmong...", EVEN THOUGH IT THOROUGHLY COVERED ALL HMONG INVOLVEMENT in Laos War (Military Region 2, Hmong SGU, Gen. Vang Pao...). She strongly believed it needed even more Hmong content. Rep. Tou Xiong was also in the meeting. Rep. Her led the conversation into other topics that I would not want to list here. To our astonishment neither Representatives Tou Xiong nor Samantha Vang (she came in last) present made any attempt to calm the argument and stood silent. In the end, that bill was not introduced and has since not been considered again. We concluded that, if introduced, it would fail right at its start because of political monopoly and racial competition.

The Vietnam War was not just a Hmong and American War; nevertheless the TPT film involved just American and Hmong. I was one of the Vietnamese ARVN veterans interviewed on film by TPT and had been included in the film until it was discovered that I was not Hmong but Vietnamese. To this day my name is included in the ending credits as a Hmong contributor.

The silent voiceless ones will be heard and recognized via H.F 2428

Overall, the Vietnamese immigrants during the first influx in the 1975-1985 might be a little more privileged being more educated, but the larger percentage of refugees from Vietnam in late 1985-1995 were dirt poor, mainly soldiers from concentration and refugee camps and under educated just like the Hmong 1st generation. They sunk themselves immediately into any available jobs to avoid depending on public assistance. They have sacrificed, but not many Minnesotans know about them and therefore have not recognized and honored their role in the war. They, like the Hmong, continued to suffer from PTSD and also from the major shame of having failed to defend their homeland. Besides the 58,220 US personnel who died in Vietnam, at least 300,000 South Vietnam military died in action. Of the 1.2 million Vietnamese Boat People escaping Vietnam, 40% died at sea (at least 400,000), while 200,000 of the 800,000 military and civil servants under the RVN died in concentration camps. Lao were incarcerated and died in camps, too. At least 3 million Cambodian civilians and 250,000 military personnel had lost their life in a short but bloody war that Pres. Nixon initiated. Some 20,000 Royal Lao and 10,000 Hmong had also died, and many incarcerated. Why silence their desperate voice? Whose conspiracy is it? Being silent does not mean they have no value to our society. Out of despair and disappointment, they became even more silent.

I know Minnesotans have a good heart because I have served some 12,000 children. I know The State legislature if given accurate and honest information is fair because I have also served and upheld their programs, policy and laws since I resettled here in 1975. I also know most legislators, including the young generation Hmong members, are not well informed about the Vietnam War. Much harm has already been done to all Vietnam War brave combatants because of the new 2018 PBS Ken Burns 18-hour series glorifying the communist Vietnamese, omitting the Lao, Hmong, Cambodian and dishonoring the Vietnam Veterans. This unfair disinformation will lead to more misunderstanding of Asians in America. The local PBS /TPT network follows suit by silencing the Lao, Cambodian and ARVN by omission. These are the voiceless population that has been humiliated and dishonored. They will not speak up unless given the opportunity the CAVWV has forwarded. We need a film comparable to the one in 2018 by PBS and TPT that has given monopoly to the Hmong Minnesotans. It will clarify the misinformation that has mislead people, dishonored and altered the hope, mental wellbeing of our productive and loyal citizens of Minnesota.

As a socio-scientist researcher committed to factual history of The War and the legacy of its Freedom and Democracy defenders, I hereby testify to support Representative Steve Green's House File 2428. It is a matter of equity and social justice that the grant requested be unanimously granted. April is here again the 46th time. It was this same month in 1975 when the Khmer Republic fell to the Khmer Rouge and the Republic of Vietnam fell to the communist North Vietnamese, the Kingdom of Laos including the Hmong fell to communist the Pathet Lao. The survivors are taking turns dying. They should not die shamefully and dishonored. Approving Representative Green's House File 2428 will be the most precious gift ever for them and for their descendants. Also, it will definitely help unite all Southeast Asians Minnesotans and provide a much needed opportunity to be proud of their experiences. Thank you for your patience. Stay well!

Ha H. Tuong, Ed. D.

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Resident of Bloomington 2001-current

Resident of Minneapolis 1975-2000

Attachments: SE Asian Population in Minnesota - Census 2010

Copy of Asian Pacific Minnesotans Council Executive Director Sia Her

Minnesota is home to the

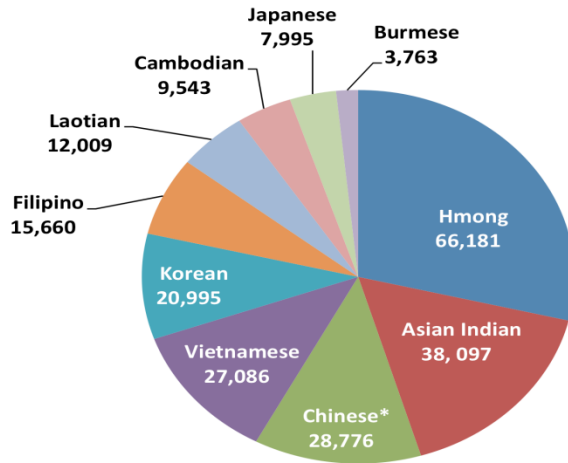
2nd largest number of Hmong

3rd largest number of Laotians

5th largest number of
Burmese

6th largest number of
Cambodians

Minnesota's Ten Largest Asian Populations, by Ethnic Group
(Alone, or in any combination)



*except Taiwanese

Source: U.S. Census 2010, Summary File 1



March 16, 2017

Madam Chair S. Anderson
State Government Finance Committee
Room 10, State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans ("the Council") submits this letter in **strong support of House File (H.F.) 127**, the request for \$650,000 in state funds to support a key component of the "Vietnam: Minnesota Remembers" project, the Digital Story Wall. We at the Council, the state agency charged with advising legislators on behalf of Minnesotans of Asian and Pacific descent, are humbled to lend our support to H.F. 127.

This project will honor and tell the stories of Minnesotans during the Vietnam era, including the Hmong. The Council believes this project will be invaluable to Minnesotans, especially our largest Asian Minnesotan community, the Hmong, for a number of reasons. First, Minnesota is home to an estimated 90,000 strong Hmong community, also identified as the second largest in the nation, and the largest urban concentration in the United States. Second, the elders of this community played a front-and-center role in the so-called Secret War in Laos. When the Americans withdrew in 1975, the Hmong were persecuted. Families fled to Thailand, and many were killed on their way through the jungles or in the dangerous crossing of the Mekong River.

The Digital Story Wall will make accessible to Americans, for many years to come, the experiences of Minnesotans who served in the conflict in Southeast Asia. Most Minnesotans crossed the ocean to serve, while the Hmong served in their home country because they believed in the mission of the United States. The Hmong were not aware of the political turmoil in the United States, they only knew that they believed in the values of America as they saw them in Laos.

The Hmong that arrived in Minnesota in the 1970s and 1980s were grief-stricken, traumatized, and disoriented refugees who learned promptly – in spite of linguistic and cultural barriers – that America was undecided about whether or not the newly arrived refugees were its allies, and deserved support and acceptance. As the generation who fought and supported the Americans in Laos continues to age and die, this project will help them know that their sacrifices were not in vain. For their children and grandchildren, this project will be an instructive lesson in their cultural history – both of their cultures, the Hmong and the American.

This project is designed to do what art at its best does – comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. I am reminded of the first time that I saw the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, released in the 40th anniversary of the D-Day conflict. For those of the World War II generation, the movie served to provide comfort as it showed the heroism of the American soldiers. For those younger, they were afflicted by the trauma and intensity of the story. The fact that it was technically a work of fiction did not diminish the power of the story.

Vietnam: Minnesota Remembers will serve as a means of uniting all of us as Minnesotans, as Americans, as "Out of Many, One." On behalf of the Council, I encourage you to support the passage of H.F. 127. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sia Her
Executive Director