

Date of Hearing:

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

ACR 112 (Bigelow) – As Introduced July 2, 2019

SUBJECT: Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway

SUMMARY: Designates a portion of State Route (SR) 120 in Mono County as the "Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway." Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Recounts the life and accomplishments of Chiura Obata, a Japanese artist whose life and work have been celebrated and exhibited throughout the world, and whose legacy in connection to our National Parks remains an inspiration for all Californians.
- 2) Designates the portion of SR 120 in Mono County as the "Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway."
- 3) Requests that the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) determine the cost of appropriate signs, consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system, showing the special designation and, upon receiving donations from non-state sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

EXISTING LAW: Assigns Caltrans the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways. This includes the installation and maintenance of highway signs.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, but the resolution requests that Caltrans only erect the appropriate signage upon receiving donations from non-state sources covering the cost.

COMMENTS: Chiura Obata was born on November 18, 1885, in Japan and raised in the city of Sendai. At seven years of age, he began his formal training in the art of sumi-e, Japanese ink and brush painting. At age fourteen, Obata began an apprenticeship with a master painter in Tokyo, and in 1901, he received a prestigious art award in Tokyo. In 1903, Obata boarded a steamship for the United States as a teenager with a desire to see the world and study art, eventually finding a home in San Francisco, California. He found the California landscape to be a true inspiration for his painting.

In 1932, Obata began his career as an influential educator, teaching in the art department at the University of California, Berkeley for nearly 20 years. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the President's Executive Order resulted in the forced removal of all Japanese Americans on the west coast of the United States. In April 1942, Obata and his family were sent to the Tanforan Racetrack near San Francisco and eventually to the Topaz War Relocation Center in central Utah. Firmly believing in the healing power of art, in less than a month he and his fellow artists were able to create an art school with over 600 students.

In 1954, two years after the United States government allowed Japanese immigrants to become citizens of the United States, Obata and his family became naturalized American citizens. In that same year, Chiura and his wife, Haruko Obata, led the first of the "Obata Tours" to Japan, introducing many Americans to Japanese arts, architecture, and culture; the tours fostered understanding through the arts between the two countries that had previously been at war. From

1955 to 1970, until he was 85 years of age, Obata traveled throughout California, giving lectures and demonstrations on Japanese brush painting and in 1965, in Japan, Obata received the Emperor's Award, the Order of the Sacred Treasure, 5th Class, in recognition of his efforts to spread cultural understanding.

According to the author, "This measure is a tremendous opportunity to honor a painter known for his beautiful artwork of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada. I consider myself very fortunate to represent such a beautiful Assembly District, which is depicted in much of his work. Recognizing him with a highway memorial resolution on Highway 120 will provide those who honor his memory the opportunity to do so as they enter a part of the state that he loved very much."

Many organizations and individuals writing in support of this measure conclude, "At this time when we are experiencing so much racism, it is important that we honor someone that has promoted beautiful artwork of nature. Through his art, the beauty and love of places depicted by Mr. Obata should receive recognition."

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Eric Thronson / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093