

Date of Hearing: June 16, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Pilar Schiavo, Chair

SCR 143 (Umberg) – As Introduced March 10, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 36-0

SUBJECT: Hmong Laotian Special Guerilla Unit veterans.

SUMMARY: Honors and celebrates Hmong Laotian Special Guerilla Unit (SGU) veterans and their families and recognizes their sacrifice. Specifically, **this resolution:** makes the following legislative findings:

- 1) From 1961 to 1975, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited and trained Hmong and other Laotian soldiers to form an SGU to fight the Secret War during the Vietnam War. This SGU performed covert missions ordered and planned by the United States military and CIA to deter the movement of troops, supplies, and weapons on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other areas in and around Laos.
- 2) At least 35,000 SGU soldiers were killed during this time, roughly 12% of the Hmong population in Laos at the time.
- 3) SGU soldiers have been honored with the construction and maintenance of a monument in the City and County of Fresno and the Cities of Stockton and Chico, and legislative recognition in the States of Connecticut, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.
- 4) Congress never granted these soldiers full veteran status, and they do not have military identification card or license plate eligibility.
- 5) This resolution honors and celebrates Hmong Laotian SGU veterans and their families and recognizes their sacrifice.

FISCAL EFFECT: None.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS RESOLUTION.** According to the author, this resolution recognizes the achievements of and honors the Hmong and Laotian lives lost in service to the United States. Many of these veterans were forced to seek refuge in the United States but were not afforded the same recognition as other veterans and allies. It is long overdue that the state of California recognize these courageous men and their families.
- 2) **BACKGROUND.**
 - a) **Secret War.** According to the JFK Library, President John F. Kennedy dispatched CIA agents into Laos to start recruiting Hmong men as a part of the U.S. secret army. U.S. military goals for the Hmong soldiers during the Secret War included persuading North Vietnamese Army soldiers to defect and support operations in Laos, easing pressure on American forces in South Vietnam and preventing a 'domino effect' in the region. They also undertook missions to rescue downed American pilots along the Laos-North

Vietnam border, with 100 to 200 Hmong soldiers sometimes risking their lives for each rescue.

- b) Hmong diaspora.** Hmong, a sub-group of Miao, one of the oldest ethnic groups native to China, has a long history of migration. In the last 200 years, to escape the Qing dynasty oppression and natural disasters, some of them crossed borders and migrated outside of China, to Vietnam, Laos, and other Southeast Asian countries. The Hmong refugee diaspora began in the mid-1970s when they faced violent persecution for their alliance with the U.S. during the Vietnam War's "Secret War". During this period, thousands of Hmong were evacuated or escaped on their own to Hmong refugee camps in neighboring Thailand. About 90% of those who made it to refugee camps in Thailand were ultimately resettled in the United States. The rest resettled in countries including Canada, France, the Netherlands, and Australia. Nowadays, they can be found in diaspora in many countries, including the U.S. Many Hmong Americans immigrated to the United States as refugees in the late 1970s, with a second wave in the 1980s and 1990s.
- c) Hmong Americans.** According to the 2021 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, the population count for Hmong Americans was 368,609. As of 2019, the largest community in the United States was in the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area. The Central Valley, especially Fresno, holds the second-largest concentration, where the community has a major agricultural and economic footprint. Hmong Americans face disparities in healthcare, and socioeconomic challenges that lead to lower health literacy, median life expectancy, and per capita income.

Many Hmong immigrants encountered significant hurdles while trying to integrate into American society, largely due to their agricultural backgrounds and limited education. However, over the years, Hmong Americans have made remarkable economic strides where they've crafted dynamic and thriving communities. In the 2020s, the Hmong community actively pursued acknowledgment as a distinct racial group, shedding light on their unique history and invaluable contributions during the Vietnam War. This pursuit reached a pivotal milestone with a more precise classification in the 2023 U.S. Census, affirming their identity as Southeast Asians. Despite facing numerous challenges, the Hmong community remains resilient, determined to secure recognition, and continue advancing within American society.

- 3) PREVIOUS LEGISLATION.** ACR 182 (Samuelian), Resolution Chapter 65, Statutes of 2004, recognizes May 15 as Hmong-American Veterans Memorial Day.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

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