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ACR-112 Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway. (2019-2020)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 112

CHAPTER 37

Relative to the Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 14, 2020.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 112, Bigelow. Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway.

This measure would designate a specified portion of State Route 120 in the County of Mono as the Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway. The measure would request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

Fiscal Committee: yes

WHEREAS, 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 fourteen years of age, Obata began an apprenticeship with a master painter in Tokyo, and in 1901, he received a prestigious art award in Tokyo; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, Upon coming to the United States, Obata not only was the recipient of intense racial epithets; he was even hit and spat upon by people on the streets of San Francisco simply because of his ethnicity, but he also encountered the institutionalized racism that existed in many laws of the time that restricted the rights of Asian-born immigrants like himself, including prohibitions from owning land and becoming a United States citizen; and

WHEREAS, Obata became an avid baseball player, playing many games at Golden Gate Park, and was one of the founders of the Fuji Club, the first Japanese American baseball team on the American mainland; and

WHEREAS, In 1921, Obata cofounded the East West Art Society in San Francisco with other American, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese artists to promote a uniting of Asian and Western art traditions; and

WHEREAS, In 1927, Obata made a six week camping trip to Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada Mountains that proved to be a defining moment in his professional life, about which he would later say, "This experience was the greatest harvest for my whole life and future in painting"; and

WHEREAS, Obata's art is infused with his reverence for nature, which he viewed as a powerful spiritual force; he thought of nature as dai-shizen, or Great Nature, reflecting his belief that it is an essential source of inspiration and peace for all human

beings; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the President's Executive Order No. 9066 resulted in the forced removal of all Japanese Americans on the west coast of the United States; Obata lost his job at the university and his art supply store; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, While Obata was director of the Topaz Art School, he continued to paint images of life in the camp as well as the beauty he saw in the desert landscape; even in the face of such confinement, Obata proved to be a figure of peace and resilience; and

WHEREAS, In 1943, Obata and his family were released from the relocation center in Topaz, Utah, and returned to California in 1945 at the end of World War II; after 1945, Obata continued to visit Yosemite and the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains to paint his landscapes; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, Obata's life and work have been celebrated and exhibited throughout the world, and his legacy in connection to our National Parks remains an inspiration for all Californians; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates the portion of State Route 120 from post mile R0.898 to post mile R4.766 in the County of Mono as the Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Transportation is requested to determine the cost of appropriate signs consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover the cost, to erect those signs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author for appropriate distribution.