

**Stephen Young**  
**406 Wacouta St., Unit 414**  
**St Paul, MN 55101**

March 25, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie  
House Legacy Finance Committee  
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Representative Lillie:

I write to request an opportunity to testify on Wednesday morning in support of Representative Nash's bill titled "**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict**" to provide Legacy funds for a joint commemoration program commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War that includes our Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, and U.S.-born Vietnam veterans communities.

My Father took a leading role in 1954 in committing the United States to the defense of the Vietnamese Nationalists in South Vietnam. As the Director of Southeast Asian Affairs in the State Department in October, he drafted for President Eisenhower a letter committing the United States to the defense of South Vietnam.

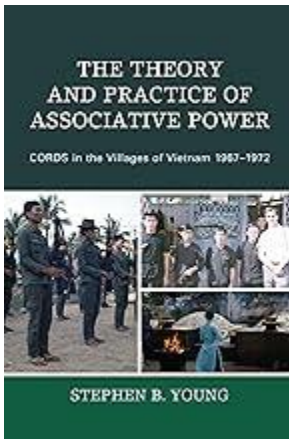
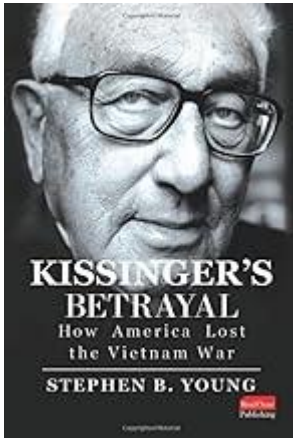
The final paragraph of that letter set forth the moral basis for American sacrifices in defense of freedom and independence for the Vietnamese nationalists, as we had done for the South Korean nationalists and the people of West Germany.

Then, in March 1975 – 49 years ago this coming Sunday actually – I and a few friends in the State Department and National Security Council – started the refugee resettlement program which brought all the refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to Minnesota and other states.

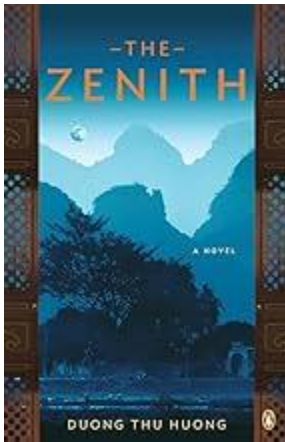
I served with the very successful CORDS program of village self-governance, self-development and self-defense in South Vietnam, was warmly welcomed by the Tan Dai Viet Party of Vietnamese nationalists, and, after the war, was personal political advisor to Hmong General Vang Pao for more than 20 years.

I doubt if anyone in Minnesota today can speak with more personal knowledge of the Vietnam War than I can. My most recent book, *Kissinger's Betrayal: How America Lost the Vietnam War* reveals for the first time to the American people the documents which confirm that in 1971 Henry Kissinger, then National Security Advisor to President Nixon, decided on his own to abandon the South Vietnamese.

My books about the war available on Amazon are:



And translated with my wife Hoa P. Young



I can answer any question members might have about the morality and historical justification for such recognition of those who served and those who suffered, both here at home and among our allies – and the innocents in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia who were victimized by illegal aggression and intolerant oppression.

Sincerely yours,

*Steph B Young*

Stephen B. Young  
651 336 4812  
sbymn@msn.com

March 25, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie  
House Legacy Finance Committee:  
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200  
600 Cedar Street  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55101

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

This letter is in opposition to the language in House File 4996. The proposed bill highlights the Hmong community and fails to recognize all the other Southeast Asian communities. Acknowledgment for the bravery, integrity, and struggle that the other Southeast Asian communities went through should be a shared honor. Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people should all reap the rewards due to the sacrifice which was made to stand up for human life. These are not mere words that are insignificant but depict an accurate picture of all those who fled for freedom and landed in Minnesota. To project a true sense of the Southeast Asian community, the bill should have language that does not misrepresent the people it was written to celebrate.

Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian people made sacrifices. The bill in its current status denotes an ethnocentric tone, only highlighting the Hmong community. This tone creates division and not unity which depletes the integrity of all people. A bill of this magnitude should recognize Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian and Cambodians. I write to you today to ensure all communities in the Southeast Asian arena who work, contribute, live, raise families and create a sense of diversity in Minnesota are represented in this bill.

Sincerely,

Phouthaivanh Wilkerson



1007 West Broadway Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55411 | [www.theseadproject.org](http://www.theseadproject.org)

March 25th, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie  
House Legacy Finance Committee  
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

My name is Kaysone Syonesa, and I am a Minnesotan with roots in Laos, and currently serve as the Co-Executive Director of The SEAD Project, a Minnesota-based non-profit organization that believes in Southeast Asian community leadership and capacity building that recognizes and draws upon the value and opportunities of understanding our shared stories and their diversity. On behalf of the Khmer, Lao, Hmong, and Viet communities that SEAD serves and being a member of the Lao community, I am giving a written testimony in opposition to House File 4996. I came to America with my family as a refugee when I was a child. My future was uncertain: Fewer than 13% of Lao, Cambodians and Hmong successfully graduated college between 1990-2010, but I was one the few who was able to beat the odds and became a successful artist, entrepreneur, and community leader who graduated from the University of Minnesota.

As someone who is directly serving a community of over 60,000 Southeast Asian refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, I've seen firsthand the extraordinary stories of their families who each beat the odds in their own way, and some who still struggle. I've had the opportunity to experience the joy and pride of each community who felt heard, seen, and honored as they told their stories while celebrating our shared history together. Our most successful community members often have a privilege of understanding their roots and heritage, their legacy and their opportunities. But there are many others who have only begun to hear the full, true stories of our elders, now that many more are opening up, feeling that it is safe to share their stories without fear of reprisal or endangering their other family members, or else who feel that there are stories too vital to be forgotten that would be integral to their children and grandchildren remembering their heritage and all that they might bring to the world as Americans. Southeast Asians are not a monolithic story. Few of our refugee stories are exactly the same, but they are stories of friendship and loss, honor and sacrifice, rebuilding and remembering. And we would not have them lost.

Few Minnesotans remember the time Vice-President Hubert Humphrey visited Laos in 1966 nearly 60 years ago, 10 years before the American bicentennial. It was the start of a special relationship between Southeast Asians and Minnesota, and our stories are forever intertwined. A history of Minnesota is incomplete without an appreciation of the Southeast Asian stories that are tied to it, from world-class restaurants and internationally recognized artists, to educators, small businesses, philanthropy, and community service. But because of the complexity of our journeys and how little has been done until recently to document it, one event, one festival or proclamation alone will be insufficient to capture this treasure and all that our fellow Minnesotans deserve to hear. By including the Lao, Khmer, Hmong, Viet, Thai communities, and our veterans as part of the 50th Commemoration who have all been impacted by the Vietnam War, it will make a key difference at a critical point before we lose the most essential stories of our elders and their descendents, and I hope that this committee recognizes and supports this opportunity to work in unity and solidarity together for one of the most important milestones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaysone Syonesa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kaysone Syonesa

Co-Executive Director

M 763.600.2706 | E [kaysone@theseadproject.org](mailto:kaysone@theseadproject.org)

Souri Meleena Kruschke  
10520 106<sup>th</sup> Ave N  
Hanover, MN 55341

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Chair Leon Lillie  
House Legacy Finance Committee  
Minnesota State Office Building – Room 200  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, 55155

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy Finance Committee:

I, Souri Meleena Kruschke on behalf of the Lao Community of Minnesota submit this letter in opposition to House File 4996.

My primary objective is to ensure the passage of this bill while also allowing our voices to be heard. It's crucial to recognize that the implications of this bill extend beyond just the Hmong community. It also impacts the larger Southeast Asian (SEA) community.

As someone of Lao descent and a Vietnam War refugee, this issue resonates deeply with me because my grandfather served in the war, I've observed the profound and lasting effects of my parents' journey immigrating to the U.S., which involved leaving behind their entire lives to begin anew. They faced the challenges of learning a new language and adjusting to a different culture, all while forging a path for our family's future. As a child at the time, I could only watch, unable to contribute. Now, as an adult, I recognize the power of my voice and the responsibility to speak for those in my community who may not have the opportunity to do so.

While I wholeheartedly support Representative Nash's bill titled "50th Anniversary of Vietnam War/Southeast Asian Conflict" I respectfully urge the council to propose a modification to encompass the entire Asian community, as we were significantly impacted. If we were to submit our own bill, it would be identical to the current one, with the sole difference being its inclusion of all Asian communities affected.

Thank you for considering my testimony on this important matter. I am available to provide further information and clarification if needed. Please feel free to contact me at 763-300-0667.

Sincerely,



Souri Meleena Kruschke



**CAAVWV**  
**Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans**  
**Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102**



March 25, 2024

Chairman Leon Lillie  
House Legacy Finance Committee  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

On behalf of the Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans we would like to strongly oppose the passage of HF 4996 in total or in an amended form. This legislation is totally unfair to those communities who fought alongside the United States Military during the Vietnam Conflict. This proposed funding for a Commemorative Event of the 50th Anniversary of the ending of the Vietnam Conflict is unacceptable to our communities and is likely to get little if any participation from them.

Our Coalition has from its inception has attempted and been quite successful frankly in uniting communities. Our unity is stressed when legislation such as this is introduced and passed enriching one community over others. Dividing communities in such a way by offering money to one community and not others or weighting the access to one over another only weaken or SEA Communities and in turn weaken the cohesive fabric of Minnesota.

Our Coalition members would have testified and apposed SF 5172 if it had not been introduced and heard with lightning speed by Chairman Hounng Hawj in the Senate Legacy Committee. The heavy handed actions of leadership have prevented our communities from gaining access to, read and study these bills and then express our opinion, after all we are the subject of the legislation and the Commemoration Event. Our communities feel strongly that the legislature has omitted the vast majority our South East Asian Communities over the years while supporting the Hmong nearly exclusively. The Hmong have enjoyed public support and funding for decades. Other Asian communities have not. Its time Minnesota shares its resources in an equitable way.

We understand another inclusive funding bill has been introduced and is awaiting a hearing. We would strongly encourage the committee hearing that bill.

Governor Walz often expounds upon Minnesota as being “One Minnesota”. In our opinion and experience it is far from it.

Scott Walker  
Special Projects Director  
Coalition of Allied Afghan and Vietnam War Veterans  
Saint Paul, MN 55102