



## **The Hmong Committee of 100**

### **BACKGROUND ON LEGISLATION**

On Monday, November 11, 2024, Veterans Day, the Hmong Committee of 100 invited different Hmong veterans' organizations to celebrate and acknowledge their contributions to peace and democracy. This was the first time ever that all Hmong veterans' organizations joined hands in coming together to memorialize and celebrate. Over 300 veterans, elective officials, and community leaders attended the event. One result from the gathering was a resounding wishes and need for recognition and be granted veterans' benefit like those of their American counter parts.

Between 1961 and 1975, the US Central Intelligence Agency secretly directed and operated a paramilitary force of Hmong guerrilla fighters in Laos, known as the Secret War of Laos. This paramilitary force, known as the Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs), standing in place of American servicemembers, contained the communist forces in Laos and secured the attention of some 70,000 North Vietnamese soldiers who otherwise would have fought against the Americans and its South Vietnamese allies. The CIA's effort with the Hmong kept American ground troops out of Laos. During the war, it is estimated that between 30,000 to 40,000 Hmong were killed in action while serving the United States, and an estimated 2,500 – 3,000 were missing in action.

In 2000, United States Congress passed the Hmong Naturalization Act in an attempt to heal the wounds of the secret war by easing the process by which Hmong and other ethnic Lao could obtain citizenship.

In 2021, Senator Fong Hawj and Senator Chuck Wiger along with Senator Andrew Matthews drafted legislation (SF 986) to grant Minnesota Veteran Benefits to Hmong and other SGUs. However, the legislation did not make it out of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee.

### **NEW EFFORTS**

On Monday, December 16, 2024, the Hmong Committee of 100 once again met with leaders of four of the five Hmong veterans' groups to see if they would like to move forward with resurrecting SF 986 from the 2021 legislative session, as was introduced by Sen. Hawj and Sen. Wiger. It was agreed that the legislation captures the needs of the Hmong SGUs, and they would like to move forward with the legislation. However, they would like to add additional languages to the legislation. It was agreed that the following languages be added to the original legislation:

#### **Sec. 3 SCREENING COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED**

The commissioner of veterans' affairs shall establish a committee of no more than seven individuals. comprising of those who are knowledgeable about the Secret War of Laos.

including SGU veterans, academicians, and community members, to assist the commissioner in determining eligibility under the said legislation.

The next step is to identify the Chief Author for the bill in the Senate and House. After consulting with the “committee” it was agreed that, if Senator Fong Hawj agrees, Senator Hawj should be the Chief Author of the legislation, which Senator Fong Hawj agreed.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE HMONG COMMITTEE OF 100**

Founded in 2024, the **\*\*Hmong Committee of 100\*\*** is a non-partisan 501(c)(4) organization created by Hmong American leaders in various fields. The committee's mission is to foster the political, economic, and social growth of the Hmong community. Members bring expertise from academia, government, business, law, science, and the arts.

The Hmong Committee of 100 will help facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the Hmong veterans' organizations.

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Advocating on behalf of:

- **Minnesota AAPI Veterans Association**
- **Hmong Committee of 100**
- **SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc**
- **Lao Hmong SGU Veteran**
- **Lao Hmong American Coalition, Inc**