



SIKH COUNCIL OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

'RECOGNIZE YE ALL THE HUMAN RACE AS ONE'
Guru Gobind Singh Ji



May 25, 2010

Sikh Council of Central California
860 Almond Avenue
Madera, CA 93637

First Lady Maria Shriver
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: CA State History Museum Hall of Fame Nomination –Dr. Dalip Singh Saund

Dear Ms. Shriver,

My name is Pashaura Singh Dhillon, a retired Agricultural Biologist from the Fresno County Department of Agriculture, currently living in Madera, California. I am the education coordinator for the Sikh Council of Central California, also known as the SCCC. The SCCC is a non-profit organization representing the ten main Sikh Temples in Fresno and Madera Counties with a combined congregation of approximately 40,000 Sikhs living here.

On behalf of the SCCC, I am writing to draw your kind attention to consider Congressman Dr. Dalip Singh Saund for induction into the California Hall of Fame. Dr. Dalip Singh Saund was an immigrant from India who came to the U.S. as a young man, seeking education and opportunity. In pursuit of those goals, he encountered discriminatory laws and unfair immigration policies, but never lost faith in the promise of democracy and his own potential. Indeed, he rolled up his sleeves and made a name for himself. In so doing, he became a force for positive change in our state and country. Perhaps Dr. Saund's most memorable and historic achievement is that he was the first Asian American ever to be elected to serve in the U.S. Congress, no small feat under the circumstances in those days. He served three terms beginning in 1957 representing the then 29th congressional district (Riverside and Imperial counties). In addition, Dr. Saund was also a doctoral level mathematician, successful lettuce farmer, local businessman and well regarded justice of the peace in the Imperial Valley of California.

Dr. Saund was born in 1899 to a Sikh family in Punjab, India. He immigrated to the United States in 1920 to attend graduate school at UC Berkeley, initially intending to study agriculture but ultimately earning a doctorate in mathematics in 1924. Unable to find work teaching, he sought to establish himself in the field of agriculture, though he was unable to buy land due to xenophobic land laws of the 1920s. Dr. Saund was undaunted and set his sights on the Imperial Valley's irrigated desert. He relocated and found employment in the Imperial Valley, serving as the foreman to a crew of cotton pickers. Over time, Dr. Saund became a lettuce farmer, establishing a thriving business and becoming established in the local community.

In the 1940s, Dr. Saund became more involved in public life, playing an active role in local, state, and national issues. Serving as the first national president of the Hindustani Association of America, he worked with U.S. Representative Clare Booth Luce to modernize immigration policy related to Asian immigrants. After helping to reform the discriminatory immigration and landownership policy through the passage of the Luce-Cellar Act of 1946, he was finally able to become a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1949. Through his involvement in civic life, Dr. Saund gained public esteem and was elected to local and then higher office. From 1952-56, he was elected to serve as a judge in the Westmoreland Township. In 1956, as noted above, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first Asian American ever to hold that office. He served three terms, and was campaigning for a fourth term when he became permanently disabled due to a stroke. He passed away in 1973.

Although he was a true trailblazer by any standards, there are only a few public references to record Dr. Saund's important place in our history. For instance, his portrait hangs in the Cannon Office Building of the U.S. House of Representatives. Also, he is listed among "Prominent Foreign-Born Americans" on page 95 of The Citizens' Almanac, a guide for newly naturalized citizens. In addition, the "Dalip Singh Saund Post Office Building" in Temecula is the first federal building named after an Indian American. The fact remains that Dr. Saund is largely unknown to Californians whereas, we should take a great pride as Californians in that it was our state, which elected the first Asian American as a congressional representative.

We believe that Dr. Saund's contributions to California's already rich history elevate him to the stature of a California Hall of Fame honoree and fit very well with the criteria set for inductees. Dr. Saund has certainly transcended boundaries and made lasting contributions to the state, nation, and indeed the world. And if he is inducted into the Hall of Fame, the message of his extraordinary vision will continue to motivate and inspire people to further their own dreams.

His courage proves the American dream come true. His story illustrates the important role that Asian American immigrants and all immigrants play in shaping our great state, embodying its ideals of opportunity and advancement for all who come here. He is an inspiration to all Californians, especially to those who may still experience the sting of hurtful stereotypes and suspicions, yet do not lose faith in our democratic ideals.

Finally we strongly support the letter prepared by Assembly member V. Manuel Perez, signed by Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny, Senator George Runner and 45 other Legislators. We urge you to learn more about Dr. Saund's accomplishments and wholeheartedly support his nomination to the California Hall of Fame.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Pashaura Singh Dhillon

Education Coordinator, Sikh Council of Central California

<http://www.PashauraSinghDhillon.com>

e: PashauraSinghDhillon@gmail.com