Portrait of Secretary Norman Y. Mineta to Be Presented at the National Portrait Gallery

Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program Donates Piece to Honor Former Secretary of Commerce, Transportation Departments

Former Transportation and Commerce Secretary Norman Y. Mineta will be recognized by the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program with the installation of his portrait in a private ceremony at the Portrait Gallery. The portrait, by artist Everett Raymond Kinstler, will become part of the museum’s permanent-collection exhibition, “New Arrivals” July 27. The oil-on-canvas painting has been offered as a gift to the Portrait Gallery from the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program.

“I am delighted that this generous gift to the Portrait Gallery will be in our permanent collection,” said Martin Sullivan, director of the museum. “Secretary Mineta’s service to this country and his leadership efforts are central to the story about Asian Americans in the U.S.”

Born in 1931 to immigrant Japanese parents in San Jose, Calif., Mineta and his family were detained along with 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent at an internment camp during World War II. Mineta’s career in politics began with an appointment to a vacant seat on the San Jose City Council in 1967; two years later he won the seat in his own right. In 1971, he was elected mayor of San Jose, becoming the first Asian American mayor of a major U.S. city. As a member of Congress from 1975 through 1995, Mineta co-founded the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and engineered the passage of H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988—an official government apology for the internment of those of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton appointed Mineta secretary of commerce, making him the first Asian Pacific American to hold a Cabinet post. In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed him secretary of transportation, making him the only Democrat in Bush’s Cabinet and one of the few citizens ever to serve in the Cabinet of both a Democratic and Republican President. During the tragic
events of Sept. 11, 2001, Mineta issued the historic order to ground all civilian aircraft, the first time this had been done in U.S. history.

Mineta retired from his Cabinet post in 2006 and in that same year was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian award.

“It is with great pride that we see Secretary Mineta’s remarkable story of leadership and service honored in the Portrait Gallery,” said Konrad Ng, director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program. “He represents the key roles that Asian Pacific Americans have played in U.S. culture, history and politics.”

Mineta also served on the Smithsonian’s Board of Regents from 1979 through 1995 and supported the establishment of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American program in 1997. Currently, he is vice chairman of Hill & Knowlton, a leading global communications consultancy.

This commission was made possible through the support of benefactors George and Sakaye Aratani, Hill & Knowlton and Verizon Communications with additional support from many others. The portrait of Mineta is a part of the National Portrait Gallery’s ongoing efforts to commission portraits of living sitters for its permanent collection.

The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program

The Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program provides vision, leadership and support for Asian Pacific American activities at the Smithsonian while also serving as the Smithsonian’s liaison to Asian Pacific American communities. Asian Pacific American Program: (202) 633-2690; website: apa.si.edu.

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the history of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.

“New Arrivals,” where Mineta’s portrait will be on view, is a rotating exhibition of subjects and objects that have been recently added to the museum’s permanent collection.

The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Website: npg.si.edu. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY).

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