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NISQUALLY INDIAN TRIBE

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Artist Haiying Wu to design statue of Billy Frank Jr. for National Statuary Hall

Statue of renowned Nisqually activist will represent Washington State in the U.S. Capitol

OLYMPIA, WA – The Billy Frank Jr. National Statuary Hall Selection Committee selected Seattle artist Haiying Wu to design a statue of Billy Frank Jr. for National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. The statue will honor the celebrated Nisqually leader and activist, who passed away in May 2014.

“I am looking forward to working with Mr. Wu and having him come here to Nisqually and learn my dad’s story and our tribe’s story,” said Willie Frank III, Tribal Chair of the Nisqually Tribe and son of Billy Frank Jr. “I am confident that Mr. Wu is going to draw visitors to Statuary Hall to my father’s likeness and make them want to know more.”

Representative Debra Lekanoff (D-40th) sponsored the original bill to commission the statue. “I am honored to witness the collaboration of the Billy Frank Jr. Statue Commission with the Frank Family and Nisqually Tribe,” said Lekanoff. “They are united in their dedication to ensure that the artist can convey to the world the boundless salmon spirit of Billy Frank Jr., who represents the best of who we are in Washington State—and who we strive to be.”

Billy Frank Jr., born on March 9, 1931, was a Nisqually tribal member. He fought tirelessly to ensure that the United States government would honor the promises made in the treaties with Washington tribes. His unwavering commitment to the fight against racism and abuse has had global influence. In 2015, he was posthumously awarded the presidential medal of freedom by President Barack Obama.

“The selection of the artist Haiying Wu puts us one step closer to seeing an honoring statue being designed and created to represent the leadership, wisdom and spirit of Nisqually’s Billy Frank Jr. in the US Capitol,” said Ron Allen, Tribal Chair and CEO of Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. “Our Northwest Indian Nations raise our hands to this commitment and look forward to seeing it in the Hall of Statues and, hopefully, in our State Capitol.”

Haiying Wu was selected after multiple rounds of presentations from the finalists. The Washington State Arts Commission, known as ArtsWA, facilitated the months-long selection process. “Each artist who reached the final stage demonstrated both extraordinary talent and profound respect for Billy Frank Jr.’s life and legacy,” said Karen Hanan, Executive Director of ArtsWA. “Tremendous care and consideration went into Mr. Wu’s selection for the job.”

Born in China, Wu attended Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. He worked as a sculptor and created public artworks in Chengdu, capital of the Sichuan province. Wu emigrated to the United States and received his Master of Fine Arts in sculpture from the University of Washington in Seattle. He has created well known memorials around the Pacific Northwest, including the *Fallen Firefighters Memorial* in Seattle's Pioneer Square neighborhood.

"I felt a strong attachment from the beginning of the project, which is an experience that I have not had in the past," said Haiying Wu. "The worship of life and nature in Indian culture is in line with my own cultural traditions. I am honored to have this opportunity to understand more of the spiritual world of Indigenous people, and of their efforts to preserve the beautiful skies, rivers, oceans and all living things that we have today."

Willie Frank III sees clearly the storytelling possibility this statue represents. "My dad always said, 'Tell your story,'" he said. "This gives us a chance to tell the Nisqually story and bring some of that Billy magic to life in Washington, D.C."

About Nisqually Indian Tribe

The Nisqually Indian Tribe is a sovereign nation located on the Nisqually River with more than 800 enrolled tribal members. The tribe employs 1,500 tribal and non-tribal people in government and its enterprises under their Medicine Creek Enterprise Corporation. The tribe has worked to protect and restore the land throughout their traditional territory from Mount Rainier to the mouth of the Nisqually River and continue to do that work just as Billy Frank Jr. did throughout his life. For more information, visit nisqually-nsn.gov

About ArtsWA

ArtsWA is the Washington State Arts Commission, a state government agency established in 1961. ArtsWA works to be a catalyst for the arts, advancing the role of the arts in the lives of individuals and communities throughout the state. Programs include Art in Public Places, Arts in Education, Grants to Organizations, and other special projects. For more information, visit arts.wa.gov.