

Headline: NCRR responds to White House letter

By: John Ota

"We emphatically reject White House suggestions that the World War II internment of Japanese Americans has already been adequately redressed," said Bert Nakano, spokesperson for the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR).

"We are issuing a new form letter aimed at Reagan which addresses these arguments and we will continue to focus on our letter writing efforts. We still believe this is the most effective way to support the bill," added Nakano. NCRR chapters have collected over 7,000 letters to Reagan or his advisers, as of early January.

White House Letter

On January 5, 1988 the Hokubei Mainichi printed a letter from Anne Higgins, special assistant to the President and director of correspondence, in response to a letter Ben Takeshita of Richmond, CA sent to Reagan. Higgins raises "concerns" that the 1948 Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act and Gerald Ford's 1975 rescinding of Executive Order 9066 sufficiently redressed the internment. Higgins does not say the President has decided to veto the redress bill, but seems to point in that direction.

"These are old arguments which were addressed during the Commission hearings and again last year when the Justice Dept. raised them at hearings in the House," said Bert Nakano, NCRR National Spokesperson. "We are disappointed that the White House is raising them again, but we always knew it wasn't going to be easy to get Reagan to sign the bill.

1948 Claims Act

As to claims under the 1948 act, Nakano pointed out that "they did not even come close to compensating people for their actual losses and suffering. Only \$37 million in claims were paid, or an average of \$308 per internee, while the

government's own Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians estimated total losses in property and income at between \$810 million and \$2 billion in 1983 dollars. At 5% annual inflation, those 1983 figures would be \$1 to \$2.6 billion today.

"The 1948 law also excluded claims for loss of life, injury, lost wages or business income, interrupted education, and many other losses. And of course, damages for false imprisonment, loss of civil rights, mental suffering and psychological injury were out of the question," added Nakano.

As to Gerald Ford's rescinding of E.O. 9066 in 1975, Nakano said it was positive that Ford called the internment "wrong" and a "setback to fundamental American principles," but that was still far from an apology, as called for in the redress bill. "The U.S. government has never apologized to the former internees. Even most opponents of monetary compensation agree that the government should apologize," said Nakano.

"We hope Reagan will not veto the bill, but even a veto will not stop us. We will continue our work until the bill becomes law, with or without Reagan," stressed Nakano. If Reagan vetoes the bill, redress supporters could attempt to have the veto overridden by a two-thirds vote in both houses of Congress. If that is not feasible, the bill could become law if passed again by both houses of Congress and signed by the next president in 1989 or later.

Copies of NCRR's new letter to Reagan can be obtained by contacting: NCRR, 244 South San Pedro, Rm. 405, Los Angeles 90012 or 1911 Bush St., #1-G, San Francisco, 94115 (415) 922-1534.