

NEWS from SPARK M. MATSUNAGA

U.S. Senator from Hawaii

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FOR RELEASE: APRIL 20, 1988

SENATE APPROVES HISTORIC MATSUNAGA LEGISLATION PROVIDING FOR APOLOGY AND MONETARY COMPENSATION TO CIVILIANS INTERNED DURING WORLD WAR II

Washington, D.C. -- By an overwhelming majority, the U.S. Senate today approved legislation providing for an official apology and token redress to Americans and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who were relocated and interned during World War II.

Senator Spark Matsunaga (D-Hawaii), who authored the legislation and had persuaded 73 of his colleagues to cosponsor the bill with him, acted as floor manager during the two-day debate. The vote on final passage was 69-27, with four Senators absent.

In his opening statement Matsunaga said his legislation would "provide a long overdue remedy for one of the worst violations of individual civil liberties in our nation's history -- the evacuation, relocation and detention of American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry."

The bill provides for the payment of \$20,000 to each of the surviving Americans and legal alien residents who were uprooted from their homes along the West Coast of the United States and incarcerated in concentration camps during World War II. Each claimant would be required to drop all claims against the government to be eligible for the prescribed compensation. The bill also provides for an apology to the claimants from the United States government and would establish a \$1.3 billion fund for the compensation and for educational projects on civil rights and the treatment of minority groups in times of emergency. The bill also provides compensation of \$12,000 to each of the Alaskan Aleuts who were displaced from their homes by U.S. Army occupation.

Matsunaga explained that the bill, S. 1009, would implement the recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, a nine-member panel instituted by Congress in 1980 to examine the facts surrounding President Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 9066 and the subsequent relocation and internment of 120,000 American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry for periods of up to four years.

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camps have been taking place. Seven years ago the issue of redress began to be discussed in Seattle, Washington; Chicago, Illinois; and throughout California. Three years ago the momentum grew into a redress/reparation movement wherever sizeable numbers of Japanese resided.

Finally a commission (CWRIC) was established at the end of the Carter administration through a bill passed by Congress to hear grievances of Japanese Americans and Aleuts from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands off Alaska. The Aleutians were also removed from their island homes in 1942 by U.S. military authorities and taken to abandoned canneries in Alaska.

This year, on July 14 the first of the hearings began in Washington D.C. and continued in Los Angeles, San Francisco; Seattle; Anchorage, Alaska; Aleutian Islands; Pribilof Islands; and most recently in Chicago. Among the last of the hearings will be the one in New York City.

On September 13, a coalition called East Coast Japanese Americans for Redress was formed to organize for the hearings here, reaching out to former internees throughout New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. They are also inviting well known organizations and prominent individuals who are knowledgeable about the war-time internment to come forward to give statements of support.