

August 20, 1979

Hon. Sidney R. Yates  
2234 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Yates:

I was surprised to see you hard at work during the August recess in your Chicago office. I would think you'd be taking a much deserved vacation. But still it was pleasant to see you. I was in your office to get a copy of the JACL's bill, S.1647, from the Congressional Record. I read it and wept.

I think the JACL has bedded down with Senator Hayakawa -- in Hayakawa's bed. The bill is so neutral, it is neuter. The word "Japanese" does not appear once. We've been non-entitized. Nor does "redress." I didn't know how neutered an issue could become.

As I wrote to Senator Ribicoff, "Consider, if you will, the effect on world opinion, had Germany, in response to America's demand for reparations to the Jews, said, 'Well, first, we want to gather facts to determine whether a wrong was committed at Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Belsen, . . .'" While American camps were not nearly so terrible, nevertheless S.1647 says the same thing about Manzanar, Tule Lake, Minidoka, Poston, Gila River, Heart Mountain, Topaz, Amache, Rohwer, and Jerome. I am outraged by S.1647.

It seems to me that an alternative becomes even more imperative. I just don't see how Congress can present to world opinion and to the bar of history such a weak, insipid, cowardly, neutered piece of legislation. I feel deeply betrayed by Senators Inouye, Matsunaga, and Hayakawa -- and the JACL. There is a cynicism revealed in the bedding arrangement that makes me think that Watergate was a disease that spread and was not extirpated.

I have heard through the grapevine that Congressmen Mineta and Matsui are seriously threatened by our redress bill. I understand that it impales them on the horns of a dilemma. Vote for it and they lose white votes. Vote against and they lose Nikkei votes. Either way, they lose re-election. I have no Solomonic wisdom here, except I do believe it would be entirely proper for them to abstain publicly based on an announced conflict of interest.

I have no desire for bloodletting, even if only figurative. I certainly have no quarrel with either man. But I believe the issue is larger than the man. If, indeed, there is no secure middle ground for them, then I believe the choice must be made for redress rather than securing re-election.

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I'm not certain how precise the grapevine is. I have had to surmise that you have been faced by a difficulty such as this. I continue to hope, however, that we can use your help in formulating this legislation. For it is clear to me that we do need it.

Mike Lowry's office has been working on the bill. They seem to have run into some snags. I am not able to obtain a copy of the current draft. But I have it on good authority that the IRS funding method has become extremely complicated and difficult to comprehend. It seems to me that it would be unfortunate if the issue got bogged down by such complication and detail. The method of funding is a negotiable area. A straight appropriation might be preferable. It could be spread out over a ten-year period to reduce the annual cost. Perhaps your considerable experience on the Appropriations Committee could be made very helpful here.

I would be interested in your response to these events and suggestions. In the meanwhile, I hope you finally did take some time off.

Peace,

William Hohri

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