

Japanese American Citizens League

Seattle Chapter

316 MAYNARD AVE. SO., SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98104

March 24, 1979

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chapter Presidents, JACL

FROM: Seattle Chapter JACL

Martin M. Matsudaira, President

(206) 682-7364

The National Committee for Redress on March 3, 1979, voted 4 to 2 to support "the concept of a Congressional Commission to the exclusion of any other redress plan." Such a commission would determine the extent of the injuries sustained by persons of Japanese ancestry in our internment, whether those injuries should be redressed, and the method of such redress, if any. The Board of Governors for our chapter at our March 21st meeting, voted unanimously for a call for reconsideration because of the following reasons:

1. We feel that the so-called "Commission" approach is in direct violation of the letter and spirit of the National Council's Salt Lake City mandate. (See August 8, 1978, memo from Dr. Uyeda to the National Council, "Revised REDRESS Proposal") The main points of the mandate included eligibility, individual payments, a trust fund, and the broadest possible coverage.
2. A primary concern for speedy passage of a redress bill was that the Issei, who lost the most because of the concentration camps, be the ones to benefit. In the five to ten years it will probably take the Commission to establish itself, hold hearings, publish its findings, and recommend a bill for passage, a number of Issei will be gone. The decision for a Commission is, in effect, a decision to deny justice to the Issei. A case in point is the Commission for the Hawaiian Native Claims Act, which has not passed after many years. Like the Issei, the number of Hawaiian natives decreases year by year.
3. The "educational benefits" generated as the Commission holds its hearings in cities with significant Japanese American populations will not be as favorable as the Redress Committee believes. A Commission, by definition, solicits testimony half for and half against the issue. A Commission will serve to mobilize even more opposition to redress. The voices claiming that the camps were for our protection, that they were not concentration camps at all, will no doubt gain the media's attention. We have seen this happen throughout Japanese American history and most recently with the junior senator from California. A Congressional Commission is no substitute for a well-run political and media campaign which Japanese Americans themselves control.

4. The belief that the Commission's findings would have the credibility of a non-partisan investigation, represents a retreat from widespread ignorance into the passive pattern of seeking validation from the American public of facts we have known since 1942. The injuries we have sustained have been documented by the WRA, sociologists, and our own scholars. We must not ask Congress, through a Commission, to dictate that which it believes is in our best interests, as it did in 1942, and again in the Evacuation Claims Act of 1948. We must have the determination and foresight to maintain control and give positive direction to the Redress Campaign. We would have no control whatsoever of a Commission nor of its ultimate findings and recommendations. We will have to live with it.
5. The "political realities", according to one Nikkei Congressman, is that a Commission bill would have less than a 50% chance of passing Congress. A more direct approach will give the legislators concrete direction, rather than throw the burden upon a Commission to write the bill for us. The "political reality" is that any Commission bill leaves the drive for redress, and the responsibility of answering for redress and testifying for redress, up to the local communities for the next two to five years or however long it would take such a Commission to establish itself. According to one argument in favor of the Commission:

"The Commission approach, because it would be largely educational, will provide a basis for our chapters to get involved and participate in these hearings. JACL is not going to be able to run a redress campaign out of the West Coast, let alone out of Headquarters. It's going to have to take place in those communities where the populations are. It's the community's issue, the community's going to have to carry it forward."

We urge each chapter to consider that until the Commission is fully established, National JACL will NOT be free to discuss publicly any further redress plan.

We urge each chapter to consider the mandate of the Salt Lake City National JACL Convention representing a cross-section of Japanese American thinking in light of the decision of the JACL National Redress Committee. We urge each chapter to determine how to speak for redress in your own community. As National JACL is now saying, "It's the community's issue."

cc: Dr. Clifford Uyeda
Dr. Jim Tsujimura
Mr. John Tateishi
Mr. Harry Honda
District Governors
Mr. Karl Nobuyuki

Attachment: August 8, 1978 memo from Dr. Uyeda