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Mr. John Tateishi
[REDACTED]

Dr. Clifford Uyeda, President
National JACL
[REDACTED]

Dr. Jim Tsujimura, V.P.
National JACL
[REDACTED]

Re: JACL Redress Committee "Commission Proposal"

Gentlemen:

It is with much regret and concern that I must write this letter to you, nevertheless I am compelled to do so.

The JACL National Redress Committee, 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 evacuation/internment, whether those injuries should be redressed, and the method of such redress, if any. As the chairperson of the legislative subcommittee for redress, I was assigned the task of preparing the legislation for presentation to Congress. Without further clarification, I cannot in good faith and conscience do so.

For more than eight years, the Japanese American Citizens League has discussed the case of the U.S. Government redressing the unconscionable wrongs perpetrated against persons of Japanese ancestry. It has been a time in which much energy has been expended in discussing various methods of approaching the redress problem; and, furthermore, a time in which the victims have had to come-to-grips with the scars of such inhumane treatment at the hands of our Government.

Through all of this came an unanimous vote of July 19, 1978 at our National Convention held at Salt Lake City establishing the following guidelines as that which was mandated by our membership. The provisions of our mandate were set forth in Dr. Clifford Uyeda's August 8, 1978 memorandum to the members of the National Council, National Board and Redress Committee, which states:

" The JACL National Council, on July 19th, approved the following REDRESS Guidelines:

- 1) Eligibility is limited to those actually detained or interned in camps, or were compelled to move from the "exclusion" areas.
- 2) Individual payments are limited to survivors and to heirs of deceased detainees.
- 3) Persons of Japanese ancestry brought over from Central and South American and interned in the United States are included.
- 4) Processing and paying individual claims will be the responsibility of the United States Government.
- 5) Trust foundation for the benefit of Japanese Americans will be administered by a presidential Commission, majority of which are Japanese Americans, and also including members of Congress.

" The National Council approved the concept that the Bill which will be presented to Congress of the United States, based on the above guidelines, provide the broadest possible coverage."

" Further details may be worked out during negotiations with the Government".

It is my firm belief that the positions taken by the Redress Committee at our last meeting violated that mandate; that the ramifications of the proposed Commission approach were not fully explored to the extent that a firm position can, at this time, be taken on behalf of our membership and Japanese America; and that our vote was dictated solely by the ill-reasoned interpretation of the off-the-cuff statements of our Nikkei in Congress.

The reasons cited by Committee members in support of the Commission approach were that "political realities" at this time limit the chances of a redress bill passing and that the publicity surrounding the Commission hearings could fulfill the educational objectives of our campaign.

First of all, 3 out of the 4 committee members who voted in support of the Commission approach expressed reluctance in approving such a position due to the "inherent dangers" of such an approach. It was felt that we would have "only one shot at obtaining redress." Without having first carefully considering all possible advantages and disadvantages of a commission as well as the other alternatives, I believe that we are breaching the faith placed in our hands by our membership to whom we are ultimately responsible. The track records of legislative commissions are, at best, poor. As stated by one of our Nikkei Congressmen, a commission bill would have difficulty passing with a probable passage rate of less than 50%. A more direct approach would allow us to give the legislature some concrete direction rather than throw the burden upon the commission to dictate what our concerns really are.

There is the belief by our Committee that the Commission's findings would have the credibility of an impartial investigation. This approach, however, throws the redress campaign back several years and retreats into the passive pattern of again seeking validation by the American public of facts we have known since 1942. We must not allow the U.S. Government, through a commission, to dictate that which it believes is in our best interests, as it did in 1941 and 1942, and again in the Evacuation Claims Act of 1948. We must have the determination and foresight to continue to maintain control and give positive direction to the redress campaign. We have no control whatsoever of a commission nor of its ultimate findings and recommendations.

Even if a commission were established, years will pass before any redress would be instituted. It will still be necessary for an appropriations bill to be passed in order for redress payments to be made. There will still be substantial opposition to such appropriations. Additionally, in the five to fifteen years it will take the Commission to be approved, established, hearing held, findings and recommendations published, and, assuming it favors redress, push a bill through to passage, the Issei will be gone. We will be forced to go to Congress twice instead of fighting the battle which we can orchestrate. We must not lose sight that one of our primary objectives is for speedy passage in order to benefit the Issei. A case in point is the Hawaiian Native Claims Act which has not passed after many years. And, like the Issei, the number of Hawaii natives decreases year by year.

The "educational benefits" generated by the Commission will not be as favorable as the Redress Committee believes. Commissions, with their historic policy of soliciting testimony half for and half against, will serve to mobilize the

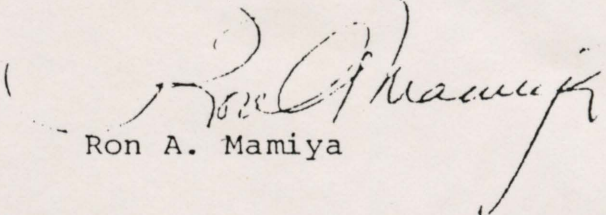
the opposition to redress. The voices claiming the "camps" were for our protection, that they were not concentration camps at all, will be given substantial media coverage. We have seen this happen throughout Japanese American history and most recently in the publicity given to the junior Senator from California. A Congressional Commission is no substitute for a well-run redress campaign in which we have at least some control.

It is my firm belief that our membership did not authorize us to act in such an imprudent manner; and would not appreciate the now chosen course of action if it was aware of the facts as we know them. I call upon each of you to reconsider your decision, not on the basis of political expedience, but as the result of careful consideration and well-reasoned planning. We must not allow our Government to dictate what we want and what is best for us.

Therefore, I ask each of you to advise me in accordance with the above, and, further, explain how a Congressional Commission falls within the Salt Lake City National Convention mandate.

I anxiously await your responses.

Very truly yours,


Ron A. Mamiya

RAM/sjt

c.c. Hon. Robert Kastenmeier
Mr. Ronald K. Ikejiri
Mr. George Kondo
Mr. Karl Nobuyuki
Mr. Harry K. Honda
Mr. William Marutani
Mr. Henry Miyatake
Mr. Raymond Okamura
Mr. Phil Shigekuni
Mr. Minoru Yasui