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JAPANESE-AMERICAN SENATOR TELLS DRAMATIC STORIES OF
WAR INTERNEES

BY TOM SEPPY

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP) SEN. SPARK MATSUNAGA BECOMES
EMOTIONAL WHEN TALKING ABOUT THE INTERNMENT IN U.S.
PRISON CAMPS OF THOUSANDS OF JAPANESE-AMERICANS DURING
WORLD WAR II.

AN AMERICAN OF JAPANESE DESCENT, MATSUNAGA,
D-HAWAII, BREEZED THROUGH A REPORT WEDNESDAY TO A
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ACTIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON
WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS. BUT
HE SLOWED DOWN, FIGHTING BACK TEARS, WHEN RELATING
TESTIMONY GIVEN TO THE COMMISSION BY INTERNEES WHO TOLD
THEIR STORIES, SOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

MATSUNAGA SAID THE JAPANESE-AMERICANS TOLD OF
INFANTS, YOUNG MOTHERS AND ELDERLY PEOPLE WHO DIED FOR
LACK OF ADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE, AND OF FAMILIES THAT
WERE SEPARATED, PARENTS GOING TO ONE CAMP, THEIR
CHILDREN TO ANOTHER.

HE PAUSED FOR A SIP OF WATER TO CLEAR HIS THROAT

BEFORE CONTINUING HIS ACCOUNT BEFORE A GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION TO COMPENSATE THE INTERNEES.

THEY DESCRIBED, HE SAID, LARGE FAMILIES FORCED TO LIVE TOGETHER IN ONE SMALL ROOM. THEY SPOKE OF CONSTANT, NAGGING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE AND THE STRAINS ON THEIR FAMILIES AND THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE.

ANOTHER SIP OF WATER.

“AND, MOST DRAMATICALLY, OF INTERNEES WHO WERE SHOT AND KILLED BY CAMP GUARDS BECAUSE THEY INADVERTANTLY WANDERED TOO CLOSE TO THE CAMP FENCES,” HE SAID, DESCRIBING ONE SUCH INCIDENT IN WHICH AN ELDERLY MAN, PLAYING CATCH WITH HIS GRANDSON, WAS SHOT TO DEATH TRYING TO RETRIEVE A BALL THAT BOUNCED BETWEEN TWO OFF-LIMITS BARBED WIRE FENCES.

TEARS WELLED FROM BOTH EYES AND MATSUNAGA'S VOICE SHOOK AS HE TOLD OF ONE INTERNEE, AN ELDERLY AMERICAN VETERAN OF WORLD WAR I, WHO COMMITTED SUICIDE BECAUSE “HE WAS SO ASHAMED OF BEING BRANDED AS ‘DISLOYAL’ TO THE UNITED STATES.”

THE NINE-MEMBER COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT CONCLUDED IN 1983 THAT THERE WAS NO MILITARY NECESSITY FOR THE MASS INCARCERATION OF AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY.

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MATSUNAGA AND SEN. DANIEL INOUE, BOTH D-HAWAII, HAVE ATTRACTED 75 CO-SPONSORS TO A BILL THAT WOULD AUTHORIZE \$1.5 BILLION TO COMPENSATE THE 120,000 WHO WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES AND WERE PLACED IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS FOR UP TO FOUR YEARS.

JAPANESE-AMERICAN GROUPS TESTIFIED THAT APPROXIMATELY 60,000 ARE STILL ALIVE.

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A SIMILAR BILL PASSED THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ON WEDNESDAY BY A VOTE OF 28-6. MATSUNAGA BECAME

EMOTIONAL WHEN TALKING ABOUT THE INTERNMENT IN U.S.

THE MEASURES ALSO CARRY \$45 MILLION IN COMPENSATION FOR THE 880 ALEUT PEOPLE WHO WERE FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES AND MOVED TO TEMPORARY CAMPS IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA DURING WORLD WAR II. SEN. FRANK MURKOWSKI, R-ALASKA, SAID ABOUT 80 OF THEM DIED IN THE CAMPS. ABOUT 400 ARE STILL LIVING, HE SAID.

COMMISSION ON

RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS. BUT HE PAUSED FOR A SIP OF WATER TO CLEAR HIS THROAT. TESTIMONY GIVEN TO THE COMMISSION BY INTERNEES WHO TOLD THEIR STORIES, SOME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

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