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Subject: Regards: Mike Masaoka Video & Audio
Date: Mon, 13 Mar 2000 13:28:20 EST Status: Normal
From: Brdcstr@aol.com Save Address

Dear Frank,

In speaking to Martha Nakagawa at the Pacific Citizen this morning, she tells me you are in the post production stages of your documentary about the resisters. I would like to see it and perhaps do a story and interview with you.

Martha also tells me you have SOT videotape of comments by the late Mike Masoka, who has been the center of a controversy in connection with the National Japanese American Memorial slated for dedication Nov. 9 in Washington, D.C. I have attached a story I wrote about the last NJAMF board meeting. Any chance at viewing or listening to the Masaoka comments? I am headed for Los Angeles March 15 to 25 and I will at my mother's home. Her telephone number is 818-556-5419, and my local phone number is 408-749-9323. My home address is 656 Litton Ct., Sunnyvale, CA 94087. My Southern California address is: 837 E. Cornell Drive, Burbank, CA 91504.

Incidentally several videos or films are to be screened at the Smithsonian during the dedication celebration. As controversial a subject you are tackling, you might want to check if the Smithsonian Institution would consider showing your documentary. Productions by Bob Nakamura and Gayle Yamada will be featured. I don't know who is in charge, but you might want to call Frank Odo at the Smithsonian to learn more. His office number is: 202-786-2963, and I believe his email address is: fodo@op.si.edu

Look forward to talking with you again soon.

Sam Chu Lin

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Board Member Threatens Lawsuit
with National Japanese American Memorial Foundation
by Sam Chu Lin

It was an emotional roller coaster ride for the Board of Directors of the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) as they met this past weekend (Friday & Saturday-Feb. 25-26, 2000) at the Hilton San Diego Resort Hotel. The delegates had flown in from all across the country to get an update on the progress with the new \$11 million monument in Washington, D.C., that recognizes the patriotism of Japanese Americans during World War II, and to vote on what inscriptions will be engraved on it. The session was filled with plenty of debate and controversy over what quotes should be carved in stone and whether or not any names including Mike Masaoka should be deleted or added to the monument. The directors voted 27 to 6 with one abstention to end many months of discussion over this matter and to approve the final selection of the inscriptions. Many of them declared, "It's time to move on." But that remains to be seen.

Anticipating the outcome of the vote, attorney Frank Sogi, a dissenting board member from New York City, stood up moments before the roll call and warned, "We feel this matter has been in the political arena for too long. I think the time has come to move this issue to the legal arena where we feel the field is much more level."

Later in the day, after Sogi left for a flight to Hawaii, the directors responded by authorizing board chairman Mel Chiogioji to seek legal assistance if a lawsuit materializes.

As currently approved, there are fifty-two stone panels that are to be

engraved on the monument. If this process is completed at the quarry in Minnesota, officials say this could mean a savings of \$200,000, money that could be used for educational purposes. The panels feature a history of Executive Order 9066 and its repercussions, the names of ten internment camps, and quotes from Presidents Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan, Congressmen Norman Mineta and Bob Matsui, Senators Spark Matsunaga and Daniel Inouye, and World War II veteran and civil rights advocate Mike Masaoka.

He is credited with generating the idea for this national monument, but Masaoka's name has drawn most of the fire. His critics have accused him of collaborating with the government in the round up of Japanese Americans during World War II.

"I can say in our living room and our dining room there were great leaders of the Japanese American Citizens League who discussed out loud what approaches they should be making and what they should be doing with the Japanese American community in working with the U.S. government," Mineta spoke in defense of his brother-in-law. "It seems to me what they were trying to do was to make the best of a bad situation."

He continued on, "All this nonsense of Mike being an informant for the FBI, that he was trying to form labor battalions for cheap labor with the people in the camps, a suicidal military unit, all of these things are totally false. This is not because I'm his brother-in-law. All you have to do is be able to read what went on within the Japanese American Citizens League, and what went on within the Japanese American community."

"I know what they're after is to just get his name removed from the memorial. But again that approach has been rejected now on five occasions, and on this vote it was over a four to one rejection of their approach."

Bill Hosokawa, a former editor of the Denver Post who wrote an autobiography with Masaoka called "They call Me Moses Masaoka," feels he deserves this honor to have his name inscribed on the monument. In response to the accusations made against Masaoka, Hosokawa said, "Mike and a lot of other people were floating all kinds of ideas about what might be done to prevent a mass evacuation. I am convinced that this reference to a 'suicide battalion' was just one of scores of ideas that were floated. I don't think he was actively advocating such actions."

During the two-hour discussion before a vote on the inscriptions was taken, Sogi pointed out that the National Park Service, which is in charge of overseeing this project, has received more than 150 letters asking that Masaoka's name be removed from the monument.

"Those of us who don't know how it (political process) works, we have no recourse but to write to the National Park Service hoping after hope that we would resolve this problem amicably," Sogi stated. "It seems to me that this will continue and the only recourse is to take it to the legal arena. We think that there is a wrong and we are seeking a remedy."

During a lunch recess, board chairman Chiogioji countered by stating an overwhelming majority of the directors representing thousands of people voted to approve the selection of the inscriptions including the one written by Masaoka.

"A majority of the board feels very strongly that Mike Masaoka deserves to be on the memorial," he said, "primarily because he has done a lot of good things. Regardless of the allegations of what he supposedly did during World War II, if you take a look at what he did over a long term, he did a lot of positive good. . . . He didn't want money for reparations, but so what! That was his opinion. In the political process you give your opinion. In the end, he supported it. I think what is happening here is people forget what the context was in which all of this controversy occurred."

Rita Takahashi of Berkeley, one of the original eight dissenters, felt there had been "a rush to push the vote through to accept all of the inscriptions as they are written."

"Under usual circumstances, when a decision is made by a body, you support that position, that is if I felt that everything was done above board, accurately, fairly, squarely. But when I feel that things have not been done properly and appropriately and have not been applied consistently to all, then the ball game changes," Takahashi stated.

During the board meeting, Takahashi outlined some of her concerns.

She said more attention should be paid to eliminating euphemisms from the inscriptions that have been used to describe the Japanese American experience during World War II, including such words as 'relocation camp' and 'evacuee.' She also noted there were "a lot of inaccuracies, for example, the numbers that are listed of how many people were in each of the camps are not consistent with what the final reports say from the WRA (War Relocation Authority)."

"The text is focused more on only persons who went to camp in terms of the exclusion orders. I think there are other areas for example, the persons who were already living inland who were also adversely affected."

She continued on, "There is the question of gender bias. All of the quotations on the inscriptions are males and no females, that the one female who contributed to the text portion, namely the tanka, her name (Akemi Erlich) is left off. I think her name should be restored and credited to the tanka."

That can only be accomplished with a majority of the board of directors voting in session for reinstatement. On a motion made by William Marutani and approved by the board of directors, Erlich's name was removed from the monument. Because work on the inscriptions is about to get underway, the board of directors will most probably have to be polled and that vote must be 100%, reducing her chances for reinstatement.

Takahasahi also called for more public input regarding the Masoka controversy and other issues. "I think it's important to take the time to come up with inscriptions that everyone is going to be pleased with, that will withstand the test of time and bring the community together as opposed to pulling them apart," she stated.

Don Nakanishi of UCLA's Asian American Studies Department, who asked for a delay on the approval of the inscriptions and was unable to attend this latest board meeting, shares some of the same feelings.

"There are a lot of things this monument lacks in terms of balance," Nakanishi commented. "It's not only women; it's also a quite narrow definition of patriotism."

"I think there are more ways in which Japanese Americans exhibited patriotism than simply either going along with the decision to leave their homes and go into the concentration camps or to serve in the armed forces."

"I think there are people who challenged the constitutionality of removal and incarceration, who felt that they had rights similar to other citizens; who questioned why they were treated unjustly --- people like Fred Korematsu, Minoru Yasui, and Gordon Hirabayashi, --- as well as those who resisted the draft for larger principles and who wished that this country would live up to its democratic ideals. I think the vast majority of the contemporary Japanese American community has come to accept this broader perspective of the diverse ways in which one could be patriotic during the war."

Hosokawa, who wrote the original essay for the memorial, said the Fine Arts Commission and the National Parks Service asked that the inscriptions be brief.

"The first draft of the inscription that I wrote ran 20 to 25 pages," he recounted. "It was quite inclusive. It's now down to ten paragraphs or something like that. The board has been very widely split on the inscription, and most of us were very upset that it had to be shortened so much. The feds kept reminding us that the farmer from Iowa visiting Washington is not going to read a very long inscription. They felt it was very important to have something with impact even though it wasn't complete."

While the debate continues over the inscriptions, many of the board members are disturbed by Sogi's comments and have appealed to him to reconsider

"I would be quite sad, if a red neck threw a bomb into the memorial," reacted Paul Terasaki of Los Angeles. "But I will be sadder yet if a member of this board did that."

Sogi quickly responded, "This is not a matter of my own decision of what I stated. It represents a very large number of people who have said that may be the only recourse, and that is why I made the statement."

Warren Minami, a board member from Potomac, Maryland, was obviously frustrated with the heated verbal exchanges.

"I have a dream that Japanese Americans know how to work together," he passionately stated. "I thought about all of the emotions that this is causing, and how we look to the public in the newspaper and the press."

Harry Fukuhara of San Jose was just as eager to get the business of the foundation back on track and switched his negative vote to approval.

"My wife (Terry) read about this, and she really got upset," Fukuhara related. "We've been married over 50 years. When she took me to the airport, the last thing she said, 'Resolve the damn thing!' "

The MIS veteran added, "I'm not 100% with everybody either, but I am for going along, going ahead and getting it done. It's a good monument. It serves a good purpose."

In contrast, Phil Ishio of Silver Spring, Maryland was in no hurry to vote approval of the inscriptions. "I urge all of us to do a thorough a job before we rush into things," he pleaded. "If we have an additional cost of \$200,000, if we change anything, what is \$200,000 when it means the honor of Japanese Americans. It means nothing. If it cost \$2 million dollars, I think we should wait."

Tom Masamori of Edgewater Colorado, a representative for the Go For Broke veterans organization, reflected the feelings of his colleagues. "I'll be very blunt," he said. "They say, 'What in the hell is the board doing with this memorial which we originally started, and why all of this controversy over Mike Masoka!' Without Mike's vision and desire to have a memorial for the veterans, there wouldn't be a meeting of this board."

The foundation is also hoping to raise another \$2 million to be allocated to a new education program. But there are fears a possible lawsuit could now affect those efforts.

"I will assume that this kind of controversy will diminish our prospects of being able to raise that," Mineta stated. The former congressman and Lockheed Martin vice president added that it is Frank Sogi's "prerogative to file a lawsuit, but he also has to face the consequences of it and cannot escape any responsibility from a tarnished image of the memorial, including the capability of the foundation to raise the additional money for the educational program."

Whether or not a lawsuit does take place is still up in the air. Executive Director Cherry Tsutsumida is hoping tempers will cool.

"I think these people who have a divergence of opinion are people generally of good will," she stated. "Once they begin to see the effect that this will have in leaving a legacy for our future generations, perhaps they'll be able to give it a second thought and say, 'What the heck, let's go on!'"

Attorney Jun Mori of Los Angeles, one of the dissenters and Sogi's law partner, believes someone from the board should talk to him, "like Mel (Chiogioji) and not let this get out of hand or get ugly. It's unfortunate that he mentioned litigation or whatever he did. Getting into a confrontation is the worst thing you can do."

So far work on the monument is proceeding on schedule. Recently the skeletal remains of a cow were discovered on the site. Work came to a halt for a week until paleontologists determined this was once the location of a train station and there were no archaeological finds here.

Sogi has promised there will be no construction delays and the Japanese American Memorial will be dedicated on schedule November 9, 2000.

The next meeting of the board of directors of the foundation is scheduled to take place June 9-10, in Washington, D.C.

Comments can be addressed to the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation, care of Ms. Cherry Tsutsumida, executive director, 1920 N Street, NW, Suite 660, Washington, D.C. 20036-4505, FAX: 202-861-8848

PANEL 2 (OF INSCRIPTIONS)

I AM PROUD THAT I AM AN AMERICAN OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY. I BELIEVE IN THIS NATION'S INSTITUTIONS, IDEALS AND TRADITIONS; I BOAST OF HER HISTORY; I

TRUST IN HER FUTURE.

MIKE M. MASAOKA
World War II Veteran
and Civil Rights Advocate

PANEL 34 (OF INSCRIPTIONS DOES NOT HAVE AUTHOR'S NAME - Akemi Ehrlich -
THERE ARE NO WOMEN MENTIONED IN THE INSCRIPTIONS)

Japanese by blood
Hearts and minds American
With honor unbowed
Bore the stings of injustice
For future generations

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