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International Finance, Ocean Transportation and Management

October 6, 1987

The Honorable Robert T. Matsui  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Matsui:

My wife and I were greatly delighted to meet you and your wife at the dinner in the White House President Reagan gave for Prime Minister Nakasone. We feel that you and Norman have helped raise the image of U.S. Asians by your participation in the U.S. Congress.

Today, my son just returned from a visit to San Diego and he brought back a copy of the Los Angeles Times of October 4, 1987. I read with great interest the very thorough article written by Betty Cuniberti for the newspaper. Your experiences reminded me of the experiences of my wife and I and our family during the same period. I recall that the Evacuation office told us that we were limited to all we could carry. Since we had twin babies who had to be carried, the idea flashed across my mind that since we were to be taken to a camp prepared by the military, they would hardly have diapers which at that time were of cloth and were not the paper throw-away Pampers of today. As we listed our inventory, we could see we barely had enough room in our single suitcase for the necessities for sleeping and food for the children, such as Pablum and other necessities that soldiers do not think of in the normal course of activities. Although I had taken ten years to build up a business, since I graduated from UCLA in 1932, material things were furthest from my mind. I could not comprehend why our government insisted on taking actions based on violation of the Constitution, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color and religion. But I also could understand the hysteria of the populace, fanned by economic interests, who would benefit from our departure, and the fact that our neighbors knew little about us. Most Japanese had not broken down the wall of misunderstanding that exists between the sons of older immigrants and the children of a new wave that followed a generation later. The Japanese were reticent to break out from their economic or psychologic ghettos to reach out and meet the sons of European immigrants.

According to my experience, I could understand that the U.S. was angry and possibly frightened by the sudden attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Then it dawned on me that our neighbors could not distinguish between the Japanese whose loyalty was to Japan and the people with Japanese faces, who were American citizens, and whose loyalty was to the U.S.

In the five years before Pearl Harbor, practically every leader of the JACL was working closely with the F.B.I., the O.N.I. and Army Intelligence, to screen out any persons whose actions might be detrimental in a crisis. Therefore, you will note that F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover, knowing the situation, stated there was no need for evacuation because he understood the loyalty of the Japanese American. I can understand the anger of Congressmen Matsui and Mineta even thinking about it forty years after the event, but to get the nation behind our efforts to correct a basic situation is to look at it from an objective standpoint. Our effort should be justice for the Nikkei but also to lay the groundwork so that in the future we make clear there will be no discrimination as a result of race, religion and color. Unless we do so, we are not accomplishing our goals. But to make the American people realize that certain officers of the U.S. took un-Constitutional steps during a period of hysteria, there must be something besides an apology. The American people only pay attention if there is an economic penalty.

On the other hand, we should recognize that our country is \$2.5 trillion in the red and for the confused portion of our population that mistakes Japan's favorable balance of trade as income to us, we should make clear that there is a distinction between the Japanese whose loyalty is to Japan and the people with Japanese faces whose loyalty is to the U.S. I feel confident that as long as there are men like Senator Simpson who understand the situation and other Senators who have a high sense of what is just, the bill will pass in the Senate. But the President will have difficulty approving a bill for over a billion dollars when he is asking every department to economize. To make such action possible, we need several elements.

1. The President should know the full story and he and Nancy should feel what we have felt. To make it easier for him to accept, the entire reparation bill should be broken up into five

to ten digestible parts so the payment will be less than \$100 million dollars per year. Then it is manageable. For the senior citizens over 65, some action should be taken immediately, or else they will pass on and there are no "grandfather" rights.

2. The Japanese in Japan should be persuaded by high Administration officials to bankroll non-military expenses in which both the U.S. and Japan have a joint interest. The U.S. pays a trillion dollars per Presidential term to provide a defense umbrella over the free nations. The free nations try to "poor mouth" us or say they are prohibited from contributing by Congressional restrictions to that bill. Both may be true, but it is also true that the U.S. is carrying a load on civilian projects as a result of habits left over from the days when we were the richest nation. Many of those expenses should be re-allocated or the burden carried by our rich allies.

3. My associates and I are working on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve as a first step. We have interested people in the Department of Energy who have taken it up with Vice President Bush. It would be very helpful if you could call Vice President Bush to tell him to push projects where we get the Allies to pay more than their fair share so the nation will not feel frustrated. As you know, the Japanese never volunteer, but will move when they are asked. Thus, if we have money coming in to the country. it would ease our budget problems and make it possible for the President to agree to rectify the Evacuation injustice by approving HR 442.

In addition, I think we should take one further step because all of this negotiation may take months. My concept is that all persons who went through the Evacuation should be spared the headache of qualifying for things to which they are already entitled. All persons on the Evacuation list with a good record should be on the "automatic approval" list for whatever Social Security entitles them to. I personally think that all persons who went through the concentration camps in Germany should be entitled to that same consideration. I was visiting last week with a famous author, Michi Weglyn, who wrote "Years of Infamy" and by Nancy Araki, who is head of the Japanese American National Museum which seeks to preserve the Japanese American experience. They did not understand why I was not enthusiastically supporting the Reparations bill. It is because I was trained in Washington for the past 40 years to

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give our affairs a strategic overview. I think the House and the Senate bills will be fair, but unless the President has some quid pro quo that he can point to, we should understand that he will have to veto the bill. A broader program which would give the Americans a sense of fairness and would enable them to discharge their sense of guilt and at the same time, rectify a great injustice should be the overall program.

I try to act realistically instead of emotionally, because 95% of the House and Senate members are very realistic when it comes to money bills. During our brief chat in the White House, my impression was that you were a man of dedication and influence. I feel that by writing this letter to you, I have passed the burden of what I am thinking on to you. I shall continue to work to rectify the injustice to the Nikkei, but I am also working to rectify injustices to the U.S by our allies.

With warmest personal regards,



Kay Sugahara  
Chairman

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P.S. I think you should tell the Congressman mentioned in Betty's article that there is no evidence that any Japanese American fired any shot at any American at any time during World War II. If his logic and arguments are allowed to stand, does he want us to place the blame for every Jew killed in Germany on the Americans of German extraction in the U.S.?

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To Kay Sugahara  
With best wishes, Wacey Reagan



To Yone Sugahara  
With best wishes, Ronald Reagan