

NIKKEI DELEGATES TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON D.C. TO LOBBY FOR REDRESS LEGISLATION

By EVELYN YOSHIMURA

WASHINGTON.—Some 120 Nikkei and other supporters from 12 cities across the U.S. converged on the nation's capital this weekend in a grassroots lobbying campaign to give a final push to the Civil Liberties Act of 1987. The delegation was sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCR).

More commonly called the "Redress Bill," the House of Representatives version, HR 442, has, for the first time in three tries, passed the subcommittee and the full Judiciary Committee—the latter by a resounding 28 to 6 vote—completing a very significant hurdle. Now, the bill will go to the House floor for a vote.

The Senate version, S 1009, is supported by 75 out of 100 Senators. It is expected that both bills will be acted on by as early as the end of September of this year.

The delegation, ranging in age from nine to 77 years and spanning three generations included veterans of both the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee. Delegation members, who traveled from California, Hawaii and New York, have come together in Washington to seek justice, delayed for some 45 years.

Organizations represented included the National Japanese American Historical Society (formerly Go For Broke); Japa-

nese American Bar Association; Japanese American Citizens League representatives from Golden Gate, San Jose, Downtown Los Angeles, Long Beach Pacifica, San Fernando and San Diego chapters; United Teachers of L.A.; Asian Pacific Islander Student Union; and Nihonmachi Outreach Committee of San Jose.

The opening session was held in a large hotel meeting room with three of the four walls strung end-to-end with various colored ribbons. Each ribbon bore the name (and many also had the camp names) of those who donated in support of the delegation. The ribbons served as a reminder and inspiration to the delegates of the hundreds of supporters back home, and clearly refutes the claims of those who assert that the "silent majority" of Nikkei don't want redress.

The session opened with a stirring statement by NCR national spokesman Bert Nakano, who told the gathering, "We are gathered in the nation's capital, because we recognize this is a critical time for HR 442 and S 1009."

Nakano, Hawaii-born former internee at Jerome, Arkansas, continued, "Victory is within our reach, but it is by no means certain. What we do in the five days we are here, can make a difference."

"We feel a deep sense of urgency, about passing the bills,"



LOBBY TEAM— Forty Los Angelenos leave the Los Angeles Airport for Washington D.C. to lobby Congress for passage of the redress bill. The group is sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations.

Nakano declared. "We know that every month, every year that goes by, more and more of the internees pass away. Only about half remain. Also, more and more of the veterans of the 442nd, the 100th Battalion and MIS are also passing away. And as they do, we wonder if their enormous sacrifices, and those of their fallen

comrades, will have been in vain."

The purpose of the all-day session was the training of delegates on various aspects of lobbying. Initial presentations came from Ed Hatcher of Congressman Robert Matsui's office and Carol Stroebel of Congressman Norman Mineta's office.

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Hatcher began his presentation by emphasizing that the bills have the best chance of passage right now, and that this was due in large part to the grassroots efforts of NCRR and JACL.

Stroebel agreed, saying, "Five days can make a difference," re-

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to fight this wrong, but did add that there is a move to try and delete the portion of the bills calling for monetary compensation.

On this point, both aides and many delegates discussed the possible amendment that may be introduced by Congressman Dan Lungren (R-Long Beach) that would strike individual payments and a trust fund.

Both aides emphasized the importance of stating other legal precedences, such as the \$1,000 to \$10,000 a day granted to protesters during the Vietnam war for being held "without due process."

It was also pointed out that many members of Congress are ignorant of the camps, the incarceration, and even that there are Japanese *Americans*, distinct from Japanese from Japan. They stressed the importance of education and that many have no Asian constituents, and very few minorities, in general. The probability of a Reagan veto was discussed, as well.

The next presentation was by Aiko Herzig, representing the National Council on Japanese American Redress (NCJAR), the group spearheading the class action suit

through the courts—working together and supporting each other. She also gave an update on the status of the court case.

The afternoon session began with an announcement by Eric Saul, consultant to the Smithsonian exhibit on Japanese Americans due to open this fall, that there would be a special preview tour—for the delegation—of the exhibit "Toward A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution."

Then the delegates were reseated in the lobbying teams, and the afternoon presentations were made by Kaz Oshiki, the first Asian to work on Capitol Hill, with some 20 years of experience in the workings of Congress and the Senate; and by Jim Fukumoto of the Office of Civil Rights, who assisted in previous lobbying efforts for redress.

Oshiki shared valuable information about the specifics of lobbying and stressed the need to "Be prepared, be prompt, and be pleasant" as guidelines.

Fukumoto addressed the strategy behind the combinations within the lobbying teams, such as how 442nd veterans would

presentations to the concerns of the legislators being lobbied. For example, with a conservative, fiscal considerations need to be addressed. Fukumoto pointed out how the total amount being asked for in the bills equals around half of one percent of the total military budget, and was, therefore, a very small amount to pay for justice.

Other points brought out during the discussion were the importance of reinforcing those who already are supporting the bills by paying them visits to say "thank you"—calligraphy thank yous will be presented to these members of Congress. Another point brought out was the need to directly refute the myth that all Japanese Americans have "made it."

The remainder of the session was spent with delegates meeting within their teams and discussing the strategy for various visits, and reviewing biographical information on the members of Congress they would be meeting the next few days.

(Evelyn Yoshimura, of Los Angeles, is outreach/publicity chairperson for NCRJ.)