

GRASS-ROOTS LOBBYING FOR REDRESS BILL MAKES IMPACT ON CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

8/6/87
Rafan

By EVELYN YOSHIMURA

WASHINGTON.— The final and third day of lobbying for reparations for World War II American concentration camp internees culminated with a reception hosted by various Asian Pacific American groups and congressional members.

A delegation sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) had been in the nation's capital from July 25 to July 29 to rally congressional support for specifically House bill H.R. 422, and also Senate bill S. 1009.

The July 28 reception, attended by 300 people, was hosted by various Asian Pacific American community groups, such as the National Democratic Council of Asian Pacific Americans, Organization of Chinese Americans, Asian Pacific Bar Association, Asian Pacific Federal Employee Council, Washington D.C. Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), Legislative Education Committee/JACL. Also sponsoring the event congressmen Mervyn Dymally (D-Gardena), Robert Matsui (D-Sacramento), and Norman Mineta (D-San Jose).

"Just as the concentration camps are an indelible part of history, have made history in these past few days," said Bert Nakano, NCRR spokesperson.

"What we have done is to put Congress on notice that ... the fundamental issue is justice and equal rights for all," he continued.

He said that it was Congress that authorized the round-up and incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans. "It is Congress that must rectify this injustice, or once again turn its back on our people."

He stressed the need for all in

the community fighting for redress to unite, but highlighted the "grass-roots people—former internees and the children and grandchildren of internees who are not celebrities in any sense—but who have been the real backbone of this 45-year struggle.

"Individuals and groups have

was given to Congressman Dymally, who was in Africa attending the conference of the Organization for African Unity (OAU).

Dymally's early support for redress/reparations as far back as the days of the commission hearings in 1981 was cited, as



REPRESENTATIVE Norman Mineta, left, was among many congresspersons welcoming the delegates. Here Mineta is introducing Japanese American Citizens League's Mike and Etsu Masaoka.

come forward in this struggle, but without the creative and many-sided participation of the grass roots, the redress movement would never have gotten off the ground, much less where it is today."

Congressmen Matsui, Mineta and Don Edwards (D-San Jose) spoke briefly to the group, and Mike Masaoka, former JACL Washington lobbyist also made a brief statement of support and commendation.

A special award in abstentia

well as his current support in putting his Washington D.C. office and staff at the disposal of the NCRR delegation.

Special thanks were also given to Miya Iwataki of his Los Angeles staff, who worked tirelessly with other NCRR members in organizing the lobby.

But the highlight of the reception came with the group of speakers from the NCRR delegation, reflecting the range of people represented in the grass-roots lobbying effort.

"As veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, we are grateful for the opportunity to join forces in this grass-roots, go-for-broke fight for redress and reparations," said Bill Kochiyama of New York, representing the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

He continued, "We are deeply moved by and thankful for the generous financial and moral support given by the Issei, Nisei, Sansei and Yonsei for this important mission, as well as the support given by other friends of goodwill of all colors."

He also expressed his appreciation of Nikkei members of the House and Senate, as well as the "front-line troops" of the NCRR.

Frank Emi of Los Angeles, one of the founders of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee who challenged the constitutionality of the incarceration by resisting the draft, spoke about his long fight for justice.

As a result of his opposition to the evacuation, Emi spent 18 months in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary during the camp years.

He called on all in the community, even those who may have disagreed during World War II, to come together to fight for this common and just cause of redress.

Marie Kurihara of the San

Francisco chapter of the JACL spoke next. She stressed the importance of lobbying, describing it as "democracy in action." She went on to praise the Sansei in NCRR for their initiative and leadership on the redress/reparations issue, and she thanked them for bringing this lobbying effort together.

Two college students—Gary Fujimoto and Linda Asato—also addressed the reception. (See adjoining story.)

Earlier in the day, the delegation traveled to the Senate side of the Hill. Senator Spark Matsunaga addressed the session, commending NCRR and the Nikkei community for the tremendous grass-roots push for the bills.

The senator shared that the vote on the Senate side looked very good, given the 76 cosponsors, and a probable 81 out of 100 votes in favor of the bill.

This would also assure a two-thirds override vote, if Reagan decided to veto the bill.

Matsunaga then went on to warn that the racism against Japanese Americans that still exists, and many Americans' inability to see Nikkei as "Americans."

He shared an experience he had when the U.S. Senate hosted a

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SANSEI STUDENTS JOIN IN REDRESS LOBBYING EFFORT

WASHINGTON.— "When I entered college, it was the redress and reparations issue that opened my eyes. Listening to testimonies at the hearings and learning of the pain and suffering our parents felt brought out my anger at the unpaid violations. At the same time, it brought out my pride in being Japanese American," said Linda Asato, a graduate student

young people in other schools to strengthen the Asian Pacific student movement.

The campuses across the United States represented include the following: Southern California—Eagle Rock Junior High School, Gardena High School, East Los Angeles College, California State University, Los Angeles; Northern California—

GRASS-ROOTS LOBBYING COMES TO A CLOSE

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visit of some Japanese dignitaries. There were two reception lines—one made up of Japanese, the other of Americans. He and his wife were immediately led to stand in the line with the Japanese.

Also on July 28, the delegation

lobbied various congresspersons—paying thank-you visits, reminding co-sponsors to vote for the bill, and trying to urge undecided or opposed congresspersons to change their minds and vote "yes."

One lobby group, which included three 442nd veterans, vis-

ited a Texas representative.

Upon entering his office, they introduced themselves as "Japanese Texans." The congressman was surprised, not being aware of any significant Japanese population in his district.

They, then, showed him the "honorary Texan" certificate they received for their heroic rescue of the "Lost (Texas) Battalion" during World War II. The unit had lost more men than they saved in the operation.

The congressman was extremely moved, and said he thought he would vote for the bill, as the three veterans got up to leave.

After the morning lobbying visits, all the delegates met together. They were addressed by Congressman Robert Matsui, Grace Ueyehara of the Legislative Education Committee/JACL, and John Lilly of the Lutheran Conference of America. The rest of the afternoon was filled with more lobbying visits.

All the lobbying was focussed on the House of Representatives side of the "Hill." An estimated fifty more votes are needed to pass the bill, which will be introduced on the House floor on September 17—the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution.

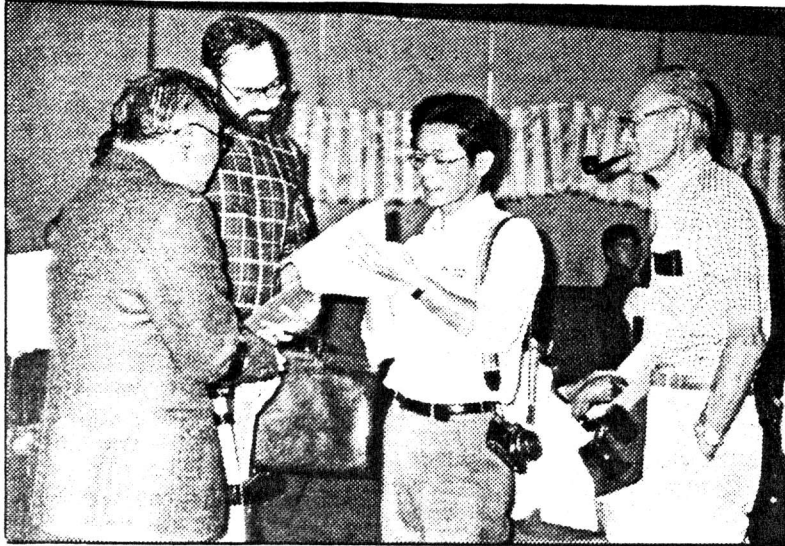
In summary, by this third day of lobbying, the members of the delegation were becoming very close, with countless meetings to plan or summarize each lobbying visit, eating many of their meals together, and sharing experiences.

In one group, a Nisei woman commented that the Sansei were the ones that were really pushing the redress movement ahead.

But a Sansei in the same team responded that it was the Nisei and Issei who were the inspiration, having survived the camps, and not giving up the fight for justice all these years. Over half of the delegation were Nisei.

Though intangible, the feeling of mutual respect, pride and unity in fighting for this common cause slowly jelled, in team after team, over the days of intensive lobbying and activity in Washington D.C.

(Evelyn Yoshimura was a member of the NCRR delegation.)



PLANNING STRATEGY— San Jose's Rudy Tokiwa, left, of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Eric Saul of the National Japanese American Historical Society, John Ota of San Francisco's National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, and Fred Korematsu, one of the three men fighting the evacuation in the courts, get together during a session of the lobbying.

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