

COMMENTARY

Seven Months
Left for Redress

Aug. 10, 1988, was a momentous day for Japanese Americans and all others who vigorously guard the civil rights of all Americans. After some 10 years of grassroots organizing and lobbying within Congress by Nikkei congressional members, Japanese American Citizens League, National Council for Japanese American Redress and National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCR), the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was signed into law by then-President Ronald Reagan.

The enactment of the Civil Liberties Act was a symbol of the potential power that Japanese Americans, like all Americans have to redress wrongs committed by our government. But like all symbols, the Civil Liberties Act won't completed the job without further action by the community.

After the Act had become law, NCR and others in our community still had to pressure Congress to provide appropriations to fund the redress program and payments. Redress apologies and payments finally became reality in October 1990.

We then found out that there were some 20,000 more survivors of the exclusion and internment than had originally been estimated. So, in 1992, NCR and other community members went back to Congress to push for an amendment to to add appropriations for those additional survivors.

Then NCR began hearing about people who were being denied redress. Over the past few years, NCR has fought alongside those denied redress through organizing meetings with the officials of the Department of Justice and members of Congress; letter-writing campaigns; constant communications with the Office of Redress Administration (ORA), support of court cases filed on behalf of claimants and sustained education about these "ineligible" claimants. Some categories have won their due redress; others have not.

Those who have won through appeal include: children born to so-called "voluntary" evacuees after their parents had moved from the West Coast (only those born on or before Jan. 20, 1945); minor Japanese American children who had been forced to be part of a prisoner exchange with Japan; Japanese American

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residents of the Phoenix/Glendale, Ariz. area who were prohibited from crossing a boundary line cutting across the area; Japanese Hawaiians living near certain military installations who were subjected to relocation, curfew and other restrictions.

Among those who have yet to win their redress are: Japanese Latin Americans; railroad and mining workers and their families; Japanese Americans whose immigration status during the War was questioned; children born to so-called "voluntary" evacuees who were born after Jan. 20, 1945.

It is now almost 10 years after the enactment of the Civil Liberties Act, 20 years since our community began organizing the Redress Movement and we are still fighting to win a more complete justice for all those whose civil liberties were deprived during World War II.

There is great urgency because the doors of the ORA are scheduled to close on Aug. 10. Now is the time for our entire community to show what redress is really all about—people coming together to fight for justice for all!

As we continue our grassroots efforts, working with the Campaign for Justice for Japanese Latin Americans, JACL and other organizations, NCR is also working with a team of lawyers to pursue court cases on behalf of redress claimants.

NCR has made it known to ORA that more time might well be required to successfully exhaust all potential remedies by the Aug. 10 deadline. NCR has inquired about the possibility of extending the life of the Civil Liberties Act. The ORA has said that it does not foresee the need to do so, given its current disposition on redress denials and anticipated workload to process those currently deemed eligible for redress.

With that position, the ORA has stated, "We must receive all new cases by (Jan. 31, 1998) to ensure that a determination can be made before the end of the program." For new cases filed after that date, the ORA cannot promise that the processing will be finalized by the Aug. 10 scheduled closing date.

NCR therefore asks all of you to spread the word to any potential redress claimants. Even if you and the potential claimant think there's no chance for redress, urge that person to apply anyway. Given all the denials-turned-redress we have

are upbeat and optimistic about the possibilities. We have come too far and won too many victories to feel otherwise. This 20-year Redress Movement has been amazing—there have been so many apparently hopeless situations that have, with perseverance on the community's part, turned into redress won. We are confident that in the next seven months, this redress momentum will break through the remaining categories of redress denials, and that justice will be won for all those whose civil liberties were deprived during World War II.

But to do so, to keep the momentum, we need our community to come out in full force to ensure everyone gets their due justice.

Please write to President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno to stand up for justice and grant redress to those who have been denied. To redress Japanese Latin Americans, they need simply to settle the lawsuit currently in the Federal Court of Claims, *Mochizuki vs. U.S.*

Please write to Bill Lann Lee, acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, to redress railroad and mine workers who were fired during the war because of their Japanese ancestry, and to redress their families, who also suffered deprivation of liberty and property.

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Mr. Lee can utilize the "benefit of the doubt" clause from the 1992 Amendment to the Civil Liberties Act, which states that when "there is approximate balance of positive and negative evidence" regarding redress eligibility, the benefit of the

doubt" will be given to the redress claimant.

Plans are under way for Japanese Latin American internees and their supporter to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with administration officials and Congress members. Representatives of railroad and mine workers will also travel with supporters and lawyers to meet with the Department of Justice.

To help these efforts, NCR is asking the community to donate money to defray the cost of travel for the members of the delegations.

This is the last leg of the community's fight to bring to the general public the many injustices committed by the U.S. government during World War II. The community must take charge and work together to ensure that justice is served to everyone.

(This was written by Richard

no chance for redress, urge that person to apply anyway. Given all the denials-turned-redress we have fought for and won in the redress campaign, one can never be sure what will happen in the next seven months.

We in NCRR will do everything within our means to exhaust potential remedies by Aug.10. And we

(This was written by Richard Katsuda, president; Kay Ochi and Kathy Nishimoto Masaoka, co-vice presidents; Ayako Hagihara, Duane Inouye Sanchez, Suzy Katsuda, Sharon Tanihara and Janice Yen, on behalf of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR).