

Support for New Redress Bill, Outrage Over Rep. Coble's Remarks Focus of Los Angeles 2003 Day of Remembrance

P.C
2/21/03

By MARTHA NAKAGAWA
Assistant Editor

This year's Day of Remembrance (DOR) received renewed interest as Xavier Becerra, D-Calif., announced the introduction of a new redress bill; and a broad coalition of Asian Pacific American and Muslim American organizations and Congressman Mike Honda, D-Calif., gathered at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles on Feb. 15 to voice their outrage over remarks made by Congressman Howard Coble, R-N.C.

Coble, who chairs the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, touched off a firestorm Feb. 4 when he said over the radio that he supported the World War II internment of Japanese Americans.

H.R. 779

In light of Coble's remarks, Becerra appealed to the more than 300 DOR attendees to support the re-introduction of the Wartime Parity and Justice Act of 2003 (H.R. 779), which would provide

than 60 years ago was wrong," said Becerra. "I don't believe a nation founded on the principles of justice can stop until it secures justice for everyone. And all of our colleagues must be counted on to help us, including Howard Coble."



PHOTO: MARIO G. REYES

From left to right: Robin Toma, JAACL PSW Community Achievement Award recipient; Congressman Mike Honda; and Janice Harumi Yen, NCCR Fighting Spirit Award recipient at the Los Angeles DOR.

\$45 million in public education monies and address unresolved redress cases, particularly those affecting the Japanese Latin Americans.

"Clearly, what happened more

In 2000, Becerra had introduced a similar bill, getting more than 40 co-sponsors, before it was struck down.

Becerra's 2003 bill would authorize \$45 million to replenish the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund (CLPEF). The redress bill — the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 — had originally mandated \$50 million to be set aside for educational

programs through CLPEF but only \$5 million had been funded. Becerra's bill would fulfill the original mandates of the 1988 law.

DOR

(Continued from page 1)

Becerra's bill would also provide an apology and \$20,000 in compensation to Japanese Latin Americans (JLAs), who were forcibly taken from their country during the war and incarcerated in the United States to be used as prisoners of war exchanges between the United States and Japan.

But Becerra may be facing an uphill battle since Coble chairs the very committee that will first review H.R. 779.

"We need you to come forward," Becerra implored attendees. "We need to get members of Congress to understand what happened because I believe sometimes the words we hear show that they're not aware of the injustices that occurred over 60 years ago So I appeal to you, young and old, please give us a moment of your time, for the moment that was lost for many who were interned. Give us a moment and help us seek justice through legislation."

Becerra urged attendees to write, phone and visit their elected officials. "I urge you to help us push this legislation into law," he said.

Robin Toma, who has been working with Becerra on the redress bill, said he was "stunned" when he heard Coble's remark and renewed his commitment in trying to get equitable redress for JLAs. Toma had been co-lead counsel with the late Fred Okrand in the JLA class action lawsuit *Mochizuki vs. United States*, which was settled in 1998 and provided only \$5,000 in compensation to surviving JLAs. Many JLAs, angered by the *Mochizuki* ruling, opted out of receiving the

\$5,000.

Toma was this year's JACL PSW Community Achievement Award recipient.

The Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress (NCR) Fighting Spirit Award went to Janice Harumi Yen, a former Poston internee who has also worked tirelessly in trying to get equitable redress for JLAs and for getting the 1988 redress bill passed for JAs during the 1980s.

She is assistant producer of the video "Stand Up for Justice," a short drama on the late Ralph Lazo, a Latino teenager who joined his Nikkei friends in Manzanar. The project received funding from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program (CCLPEP), authored by Honda and modeled after the federal CLPEF.

Rep. Coble

Prior to the DOR program, a coalition of APA organizations held a special press conference where they voiced their outrage over Coble's Feb. 4 remarks.

They demanded the following: that Coble issue an apology; that Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and President Bush call on Coble to issue a formal apology; and that Coble step down as chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security.

The coalition included: JACL PSWD; NCR, Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, Little Tokyo Service Center, Manzanar Committee, Organization of Chinese Americans, Media Action Network for Asian Americans, Visual Communications, Japanese American Bar Association, Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, Yellowworld.org, Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Council on

American Islamic Relations.

Kei Nagano, a member of NCR speaking on behalf of the coalition, said, "We are here to point out that we must not forget the lessons from the past. We must not make the same mistakes. Whenever those in power make statements that rewrite history and downplay gross injustices, they must be held accountable for their actions."

Ken Inouye, JACL's vice president of public affairs, said Coble's statement that the government incarcerated the Nikkei community for their own protection was "ridiculous."

"That's like going to every American today and saying we're going to put you in jail because we believe your life is at risk and there are terrorists among us," said Inouye. "That is ridiculous on its face and it is something this country cannot accept."

The Asian Pacific American Caucus, comprised of APA elected officials, sent a letter to Coble requesting a formal meeting. A Feb. 7 letter from Coble turned down their request.

Honda, a member of the APA Caucus, said they will continue to seek a formal meeting with Coble and plans to invite Coble to support Honda's National Day of Remembrance resolution he introduced last week.

In an informal meeting with Coble which lasted about 15-20 minutes, Honda said, "My sense was that there is some movement in his understanding. But there is a great need on his part to continue to say that he feels that President Roosevelt had done the right thing in his own mind."

Honda said he referred Coble to Prof. Eric Muller's website, which posts original 1942 documents proving that the mass evacuation and incarceration of JAs was driv-

en by prejudice, wartime hysteria and a failure of political leadership. Muller is a constitutional law professor at Coble's alma mater, the University of North Carolina, and author of "Free to Die for Their Country: The Story of the Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II." His website is at <http://isthatlegal.blogspot.com>.

Honda likened Coble's remarks to comments made by Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss, who was forced to step down in December as Senate majority leader after praising Strom Thurmond's 1948 segregationist campaign for the presidency. Lott's comments drew strong criticism from the Republican leadership, including a rebuke from President Bush.

Honda said no Republican leader has taken similar steps in the Coble case. "I think they (Republicans) are trying to dodge the bullet," he said.

Honda added that the Hispanic and Black caucuses have also sent Coble a letter in support of the APA community.

California Assemblyman George Nakano, D-Torrance, was unable to attend the event but said, "I lived in three internment camps during World War II. I distinctly remember as a child the guns in the guard towers were pointed into the Tule Lake camp. These camps were not made to protect us as Congressman Coble stated."

Nakano, who authored the bill that extended Honda's original California Civil Liberties Public Education Program, said, "Congressman Coble's comments demonstrate that we need to continue our efforts to educate people about the Japanese American experience during World War II to avoid repeating this sad chapter in our nation's history."

Salam Al-Marayati, executive

director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), said many in their community already feel as though history was repeating itself.

"Some people are already arguing that we have internment again," said Al-Marayati. "There are about 3,000 throughout America who are missing because they are imprisoned, and the charges are not disclosed to us."

Without such public disclosure, Al-Marayati said America is reverting back to the dark days of the JA incarceration of the 1940s and the rise of McCarthyism in the 1950s.

Omar Ricci, public relations director of MPAC, said they are monitoring the INS registration program and are also meeting with FBI Director Robert S. Mueller on Feb. 18 to discuss why the FBI is again surveying all the Islamic mosques in an effort to gather names and addresses.

"What's interesting to note is that they've already had this in place many years ago," said Ricci, who felt that the FBI was making this move in an effort to receive more funding.

He also said that MPAC will oppose the Patriot Act II, which is set to go before Congress soon. The first Patriot Act passed in October 2001 and gave sweeping new powers to various agencies in gathering intelligence information domestically and internationally.

Honda, who opposed the first Patriot Act bill, said he fears that if the Patriot Act II bill passes, Americans will see a further erosion of their civil liberties. Honda said he has not seen the Patriot Act II bill yet but has been informed that intelligence gathering agencies will be given even more powers, with authority such as collecting the DNA of those deemed suspicious. ■