

# Senate Votes to Pay WWII Internees

## Quick House Concurrence Seen for Reparations to Japanese-Americans

By JOSH GETLIN, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—The Senate, moving to close a controversial chapter in American history, overwhelmingly passed legislation Wednesday that would make \$20,000 payments to about 60,000 Americans of Japanese descent who were ordered from homes in California and other West Coast states during World War II and put in detention camps.

Under the historic bill, which was approved 69 to 27, the federal government also would issue a formal apology to these people, most of whom were American citizens at the time of their incarceration. The estimated \$1.3 billion in payments would be spread out over five years.

### Bill Passed by House

House members, who have already passed the legislation, are expected to give quick approval to minor changes in the Senate version before sending it to the White House, possibly next week. Sponsors are hopeful that President Reagan will sign the bill, although the Justice Department has recommended a veto. Reagan has had little to say about the legislation but it is believed to have some support in the White House.

"There is a debt here," said Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), a key sponsor of the legislation. "These Japanese-Americans were unfairly branded as disloyal during wartime, solely on the ground of racial ancestry. Their internment was unprecedented in the history of American civil rights deprivation."

Several former internees who spent time in the detention camps expressed relief that the bill had passed, saying their wartime experience had been a psychological burden for years.

"Our name has finally been cleared," said Grace Ueyehara, executive director of the Japanese-

American Citizens League, who was uprooted from her home in Stockton and sent to a camp in Arkansas during the war. "We are Americans."

The detention policy began in 1942, when the nation experienced a wave of anti-Japanese sentiment after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Amid mounting fears of an invasion on the West Coast, the federal government required the mandatory evacuation from the area of all individuals of Japanese ancestry, saying they might be security risks.

Eventually, more than 120,000 people, mostly in California, were sent from their homes. Many had to sell all of their belongings, often on 72 hours' notice. More than 77,000 of the evacuees were American citizens, according to a U.S. Senate report.

Although most of these people spent the war in the camps, about 35,000 were allowed to leave the camps after taking loyalty oaths, by joining the U.S. Army, or by taking jobs or attending college away from the West Coast. The internment policy ended in December, 1944.

### Sympathy for Internees

Most Senate members expressed sympathy for the internees, but several bitterly opposed the reparations bill, saying the nation had good reason to fear Japanese espionage in 1942. Others said the government cannot afford to spend the \$1.3 billion, adding that any apology to those interned would be cheapened by the payment of money.

"We all have 20-20 vision on Monday morning . . . it's easy to criticize what happened," said Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who unsuccessfully tried to weaken the bill with several amendments. "But I can't buy this business of kicking

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our government around at a time when the horrible destruction of Pearl Harbor had happened."

Helms, who said there was "good evidence" that some Japanese-Americans were conducting espionage in the United States at the time, said he was not sure that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was wrong in permitting internment of these citizens, adding: "I think he did exactly what any of us would have done."

Sen. Chic Hecht (R-Nev.) criticized the cost of the bill, saying the nation "simply cannot afford this at a time of such deficits. How can we in good conscience now approve a bill with a price tag of \$1.3 billion, money that this nation just does not have to spend?"

Many senators, however, charged that the United States had committed a grave injustice against these citizens of Japanese heritage and that it would be inconceivable not to pay them some money.

### Reparations to Indians

Under the bill, reparations of \$12,000 each would also be paid to about 450 Aleutian Indians who were uprooted from their Aleutian Island homes by the U.S. Army and sent to detention camps for the duration of the war.

"The first call upon a nation is that it honor its obligations, and this is a just obligation," said Sen. Pete Wilson (R-Calif.). "The \$20,000 award is in no way an exaggeration of what was lost. In most cases where property loss occurred, \$20,000 is a small fraction of what occurred."

Much of the Senate debate was devoted to recollections of Pearl Harbor and the sentiment for re-

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...enge that swept the nation in its aftermath. Tempers flared when Helms offered an amendment to block any payments until the Japanese government compensates the families of American servicemen killed at Pearl Harbor.

Sen. Spark M. Matsunaga (D-Hawaii), a key sponsor of the legislation, rose angrily from his seat and said that proposal "is totally unacceptable. It assumes that we Americans of Japanese ancestry had something to do with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We did not."

Earlier, Matsunaga was overcome with emotion as he described the story of an elderly Japanese-American man who was machine-gunned to death in a U.S. detention camp. The man had been playing with his grandson and, ignoring a guard's order to halt, chased a rubber ball into a "no man's land" between two rows of barbed wire.

"His grandson and members of his family still bear the scars of that incident," Matsunaga said, his voice breaking. "I'm sorry, I become overly emotional about it, even to this day."

The legislation approved by the

Senate implements the recommendations of the Commission on War-time Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which was formed by Congress in 1980 to redress the grievances of those detained in the camps.

Members of the commission determined that the detentions "were not justified by military necessity" but instead had been ordered because of "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

The panel estimated that, as a result of the detentions, the internees lost between \$149 million and

\$370 million in property and income—between \$810 million and \$2 billion in 1983 dollars.

According to a complex formula the report recommended a proposed reparation of a tax-free payment of \$20,000 to each eligible person.