

# Redress Bill Comes Out of Conference Committee

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The House-Senate conference committee redress bill is finally ready to be voted on by both houses of Congress.

The bill was approved by the committee on Tuesday, according to Grayce Uyehara, executive director of the JACL Legislative Education Committee.

The bill may be voted on next week. It is expected to pass both houses of Congress and then be sent to the White House.

The bill faces an uncertain reception there; President Reagan has not made any official statements as to whether he will sign the legislation.

Both major presidential candidates — Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis and Vice President George Bush — have already come out in support of the redress bill.

"I am delighted at the agreement," said Rep. Norman Mineta (D-San Jose) of the conference bill, H.R. 442, titled "The Civil Liberties Act of 1987."

"The major points of the legislation remain whole and in no way weakened," he emphasized.

Provisions of the act include:

- An acknowledgement that the wartime internment of Japanese Americans was unjust;

- An apology from the government on behalf of the American people;

- A one-time payment of \$20,000 to each eligible former internee of Japanese ancestry;

- A one-time payment of \$12,000 to Alaskan Aleuts who were relocated during World War II;

- The establishment of a public education fund to finance efforts to inform the public about the internment to prevent the recurrence of any similar event.

The bill is intended to make more credible and sincere any declaration of concern by the U.S. over violations of human rights committed by other nations.

Most of the provisions of the bill were based on the findings and recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which was created by Congress in the early 1980s.

## Redemption

The \$20,000 one-time payment to each eligible person will be given out over a ten-year period.

Those eligible for the payments are former internees who were U.S. citizens or resident aliens during the evacuation.

relocation and internment period, and who are living on the day the bill is enacted.

In addition, eligible individuals include U.S. citizens or legal residents of Japanese ancestry who left the West Coast "voluntarily" prior to the mass evacuation and internment in 1942.

If an eligible person dies before payment can be made, the money will go to the individual's "surviving spouse of one year," according to Section 105(a) of the bill. If there is no such surviving spouse, then payment in equal shares will be given to all children living at the time of payment.

The definition of surviving children includes: a natural child whose paternity has been recognized by the parent or by a court; a stepchild who lived in the household of the eligible individual; or an adopted child.

If there is no such surviving spouse or child, then payment in equal shares will be given to parents living on the date of the payment.

If there is no surviving spouse, child or parent, then the money will remain in a trust fund set up to make payments to former internees.

The bill authorizes Congress to appropriate a total of \$1.25 billion to the trust fund over a ten-year period. There is, however, an appropriation limit of

\$500 million for any fiscal year.

## Ineligible Persons

Ineligible for payments are those individuals who, during the period from Dec. 7, 1941 to Sept. 2, 1945, relocated to a country at war with the U.S. — in other words, Japan.

There are three ways the bill can be enacted: when the President signs the bill; when Congress overrides a presidential veto; or when the President neither signs nor vetoes the bill, in which case it becomes law ten days after Congress voted on it.

The bill instructs the Attorney General to "use available funds and resources to complete the identification and location" of eligible individuals within 12 months after the enactment of the bill.

An eligible individual can still receive payments even if he/she is located after the 12-month period.

Payments are to be made "in order of date of birth (with the oldest individual on the date of the enactment . . . receiving full payment first), until all eligible individuals have received payment in full."

Eligible individuals have 18 months to respond to a Department of Justice letter telling them that a payment check is ready to be sent. The person will have to decide within that time whether to accept the money.

Acceptance of the money constitutes a final settlement of all claims against the U.S. government for the evacuation, relocation and internment.

If an eligible individual refuses to accept the payment, then the payment will "remain in the fund and no payment may be made under this section to such individual at any time after such refusal," according to Section 105(4) of the bill.

The redress bill was sent to the conference committee on April 20 after the Senate passed its version of the bill by a vote of 69-27. The House passed its version of the bill on Sept. 17 by a vote of 243 to 141.

The conference committee was set up to iron out the minor differences between the two bills. There were five members (three Democrats and two Republicans) each from the House and Senate.

"There is still the final phase of the bill — funding," cautioned Uyehara, "money must still be appropriated on a yearly basis through the budget and appropriation processes."

She added that "Though no bill is perfect . . . Politics is the art of the possible and compromise, and with the average age of the victims at 65, we cannot wait any longer."

*The first installment of a chronology of the redress movement appears on the third page of today's Hokubei Mainichi English section.*