

Reagan Says He Supports Redress

WASHINGTON — President Reagan has, for the first time, confirmed in writing that he supports the redress legislation which will be sent to the White House shortly.

Because of quotes attributed to White House staff members and anonymous sources, Reagan has been thought almost certain to sign the bill. However, the President himself had never issued a public statement on the matter.

The letter, dated Aug. 1 and addressed to House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas), reads as follows:

"We welcome the action of the House-Senate conference on H.R. 442, a bill to provide compensation for Americans of Japanese descent interned in the United States during the Second World War.

"The bill reported from the conference and passed by the Senate on July 27 is substantially improved over the versions of the bill previously considered.

"We are particularly pleased that the bill provides for a measured disbursement of the amounts authorized for the trust fund and ensures that acceptance of compensation under the legislation fully satisfies claims against the United States based on the unique circumstances of the internment.

"The enactment of H.R. 442 will close a sad chapter in American history in a way that reaffirms America's commitment to the preservation of liberty and justice for all.

"I urge the House of Representatives to act swiftly and favorably on the bill."

The letter was signed by the President.

"This is it," said Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.). "This is what we've worked for more than a decade to achieve.

"Our President has told Congress that he will ensure justice is served in this sensitive matter that has affected the lives of 120,000 Americans. The President deserves a salute. In time, today's letter will become a very historic document."

An aide to Matsui said the House is scheduled to vote on the conference committee version of the bill on Wednesday. The Senate approved the final bill last month.

Rep. Norman Mineta (D-Calif.) said Tuesday that he was delighted with Reagan's letter. "It is difficult to adequately express the happiness and satisfaction I feel at the culmination of so many years of hard work, struggle and hope.

"This glorious victory is the result of the dreams and struggles of thousands of people concerned about justice. Now, finally, we can say personal justice will be achieved.

"For the small group of Americans whose abridged rights will be redressed through this legislation, this is a very proud and emotional moment. But it should also be a proud moment for all Americans, for H.R. 442 touches the very core of what it means to be a United States citizen.

"In this, the bicentennial year of the United States Constitution, our historic 100th Congress and our chief executive will shortly reaffirm the most vital rights and freedoms guaranteed

in our national charter. I know of no better way to celebrate the beauty and strength of our living Constitution than enactment of H.R. 442."

Grayce Uyehara, executive director of the JACL Legislative Education Committee (LEC), said, "We've made our 'impossible dream' come true. The nationwide grassroots lobbying by people who believe in their inalienable right to petition the government for redress has accomplished the difficult task.

"We salute all who believed and acted on faith that in a democracy, the affirmation of liberty and justice comes from the people. We salute President Reagan. We knew a President whose primary message to the world was his belief in 'free peoples everywhere' would come through."

In San Francisco, Tsuyako "Sox" Kitashima of National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) ran through Japantown holding a copy of the letter and shouting, "Look what I got! He's going to sign it!"

The reactions she got were "smiles from ear to ear," she reported.

"I got weak when I heard. My heart started pumping," she said as she described her initial reaction to the news. "This is a long-awaited victory, a tremendous victory for the Japanese American community, and I am elated.

"I have been waiting nearly a decade, but always knew the President would have the sensitivity to sign it. It means the restoration of our dignity, of justice and equality for all Japanese Americans."