

# World War II internees get apology, checks

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WASHINGTON — In an emotional ceremony, Attorney General Richard L. Thornburgh kneeled yesterday and presented an entire nation's apology to Mamoru Eto, a wheelchair-bound, 107-year-old Japanese-American minister who was forcibly interned during World War II.

Mr. Thornburgh, handing out \$20,000 redress payments to nine elderly internees, the first of some 65,000 Japanese-Americans who will eventually receive them, told the recipients that even when the American "system [of government] failed you, you never lost your faith in it."

"By finally admitting a wrong, a nation does not destroy its integrity but, rather, reinforces the sincerity of its commitment to the Constitution and hence to its people," the attorney general said.

"We can never fully right the wrongs of the past," President Bush declared in a two-paragraph statement accompanying each check. "But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to Japanese-Americans during World War II."

Other recipients who participated in yesterday's ceremony included Don Hatsuki Shima, 86, of Laurel, Md., Ken Yamamoto, 73, of Silver Spring, Md., and Sade Ide, 90, of Arlington, Va.

Representatives Robert T. Matsui and Norman Y. Mineta, two California Democrats who played key roles in the redress campaign, brushed tears from their eyes and embraced each other as the audience in the Department of Justice's Great Hall sang "God Bless America."

Mr. Mineta, who was interned as a 10-year-old in a camp located at Heart Mountain, Wyo., said: "Americans of Japanese ancestry now know in their hearts that the letter and spirit of our Constitution holds true for them."

Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, D-Hawaii, who lost his right arm fighting in Europe with the fabled 442nd Regiment, had to dry his eyes after greeting Mr. Eto, a resident of a Los Angeles nursing home.

"We honor ourselves and honor America," Mr. Inouye said. "We demonstrated to the world that we are a strong people — strong enough to admit our wrongs."

Mr. Eto's son, David, who will later receive his own \$20,000 payment, agreed with most recipients that the symbolism of the government's action outweighs the dollars involved.

Tsyako Kitashima, 72, of San Francisco, who personally mailed more than 25,000 letters in support of redress, agreed.

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Ms. Kitashima was 23 when she was sent to a camp at Topaz, Utah, carrying as much of her belongings she could cram into the two suitcases allowed by government officials. She said that for thousands of Japanese-Americans, the redress and apology "hopefully will unburden the stigma of disloyalty."

The redress program was mandated by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The \$20,000 payments and letter of apology are to be provided to the 65,000 internees who were living when the law was passed, or their heirs. The payments, expected to exceed \$1.5 billion, are to be completed in fiscal 1993.

During the war, about 120,000 Japanese-Americans were placed in remote, guarded camps on the pretext that their loyalty might be divided between the United States and Japan.

Ceremonies honoring other senior recipients will be held this week in eight other U.S. cities with large Japanese-American populations, including Phoenix, home of the oldest recipient a woman who will be 108 next month.