

VOX POPULI

UNDERSTANDING H.R. 442, S. 1009 REDRESS BILLS

By ALAN NISHIO

The current momentum for redress legislation is reflected in the growing support for the two bills in Congress; the House of Representatives bill, HR 442 has gained more than 150 co-sponsors and the Senate bill, S 1009 is endorsed by 76 Senators. As the bills go through the legislative process, a number of questions have been raised concerning the status and contents of HR 442 and its companion bill S 1009. For those supporting redress, it is important to understand the current status of our efforts.

Summary of Bills

The following represent the major provisions contained in the two bills. These provisions parallel the findings of the Presidential Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians that issued its report in 1984:

- 1. Acknowledge the fundamental injustice of the evacuation, relocation, and internment of citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry, and issue an apology on behalf of the nation.
2. Seek a review of any convictions for violations related to Executive Order 9066 or any other executive order related to the relocation and internment and requests the President to offer pardons where appropriate.
3. Establish a "Civil Liberties Public Education Fund" within the U.S. Treasury, which authorizes appropriations of \$1.3 billion in the Senate version and \$1.25 billion in the House of Representatives bill for the fund. From this fund, the Attorney General is authorized to pay \$20,000 to each surviving internee with the remainder of the funds to be used in sponsoring research and educational activities on the internment. The Senate version of the bill also contains a provision to allow use of the trust fund "to promote the general welfare of the ethnic Japanese community in the United States."

Current Status of the Bills

HR 442 has passed the House Judiciary Committee and is now awaiting consideration by the full House of Representatives with a vote occurring possibly as early as this fall. The Senate bill, S 1009, will soon be reviewed by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee with the hope that this bill, too, will be approved by the committee and brought forward for a full vote of the U.S. this fall.

In order to ensure passage of the bills in the Congress, intensive efforts are required to urge support for HR 442 and S 1009. Even if the bills pass Congress, they require the approval of President Reagan and thus a strong showing of congressional support would help to minimize the possibility of a presidential veto of the bill when it reaches his desk.

Lobbying for Redress

The delegation to Washington D.C. that the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) has initiated is lobbying for congressional support during this critical time. More than 100 delegates from California are joining others in Washington D.C. during the last week in July to lobby support for the bills. This delegation reflects a diverse representation of the Japanese American community and is truly a grassroots effort to concretely work toward passage of redress legislation.

With the prospects for the passage of meaningful redress legislation now better than ever before, it is imperative that supporters of

redress within the community work in a united manner to ensure that we speak together in a common voice of support. It is for this reason that NCRR has been building unity with the Japanese American Citizens League and other organizations in ensuring that those supporting redress are not divided.

NCRR has long been involved in seeking the passage of redress legislation. In 1984 we worked closely with the office of Congressman Mervyn Dymally in introducing initial redress legislation seeking direct monetary compensation for those interned. Since its founding in 1980, NCRR has sought to work with all groups and individuals who have united behind the principles of meaningful redress. While recognizing the limitations of the current bills, it is the position of NCRR that the provision of individual payment of \$20,000 for each survivor of the camps represents a meaningful approach to redress. It is for this reason that we unite with others in seeking passage of HR 442 and S 1009 as they are presently written.

Analysis of the Bills

There are a number of shortcomings to the current legislation that are worthy of note. The current legislation limits compensation only to survivors rather than heirs. The "community welfare" provision which would allow use of the money in the fund for the general welfare of the Japanese American community has been eliminated from the House version of the bill and likely will also be removed from the Senate bill. Finally, an addition to the two bills including a clause that would exclude the possibility of survivors accepting full payment to future claims through the courts. Thus, if the current class action suit filed by the National Council for Japanese American Redress were to be successful, those accepting full payment from the bills would be ineligible for consideration.

It is the position of NCRR that while we agree with others who have expressed concerns about these shortcomings, we feel that the bill still represents a significant response to the demand for justice expressed by the community. They also represent the best opportunity that will likely ever be available to ensure passage of meaningful redress legislation through Congress. It is for this reason that NCRR has proceeded with its support of the House and Senate bills in their current versions.

Intensifying Our Efforts

The next few months will be critical ones in the campaign for redress. Support for the bills has continued to grow in Congress and those in the community have begun to again raise our hopes that justice will indeed finally be served. For our goal of redress to be met, we must continue to intensify our efforts in the coming months to work for passage of the bills by any means possible, be it through letter writing, lobbying in Washington or contributing to the work of organizations fighting for redress. We urge your support during the coming months ahead.

(Alan Nishio of Gardena is southern chairperson of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations.)