

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1992

## REDRESS

## ORA Officials Conduct Workshop in So. Calif.

ORA director Bob Bratt said the majority of what they are working on now are special verification cases, such as those who evacuated voluntarily but failed to fill out a "Change of Residence" form.

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA  
RAFU ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The U.S. Department of Justice will have paid out its billionth dollar in reparations payments to Japanese Americans sometime in March, declared Robert Bratt, executive director of the Office of Redress Administration (ORA).

Under the terms of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the ORA was authorized to compensate Japanese American victims of the U.S. government's brutal forced evacuation policy—in three years. In each of the first two years \$500 million would be spent on redress, and \$250 million was allocated for the third year.

This week, President Bush, under advisement from ORA, proposed in his budget that another \$250,000 million be appropriated because there were more eligible redress recipients than estimated when the bill was passed in 1988. The original estimate of eligibles was 62,000, but the current projected number of eligible recipients is 75,000.

"Congress recognizes that 62,000 was just a guess," Bratt said. "Congress has been very supportive of us on this issue. I believe the request will be looked on favorably."

Bratt was "very surprised" to learn there were 15,000 more than originally estimated.

The ORA boss, whose agency locates and identifies eligible redress recipients and disburses the payments, revealed that 49,500 Nikkei have already been paid. He added that within the next two weeks, with checks already in the mail, the total of former evacuees compensated will reach 52,300, and in six weeks all eligible recipients for this fiscal year will have been paid.

Bratt made his comments at the Little Tokyo Towers in Los Angeles on Friday as he conducted a redress workshop in which he and two aides from the ORA answered questions and helped potential

recipients with the necessary paperwork so that they could qualify for the government payments.

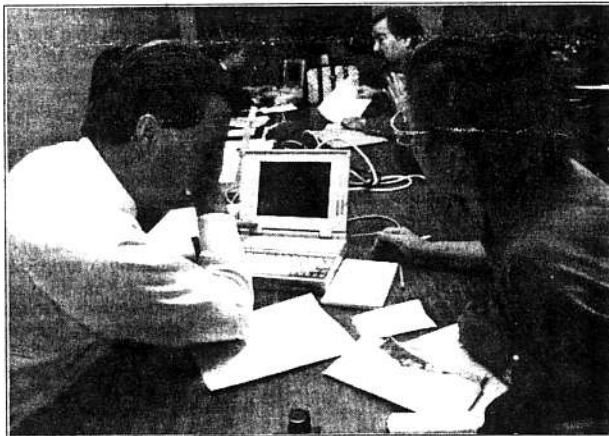
"We are working on the third year, and it is our guess right now that there's another 25,000 people that are eligible," said Bratt. "That will bring the total to 75,000."

Bratt revealed that some 920 checks have gone to recipients now living in Japan. The president has also proposed that non-Japanese

they were required to fill out "Change of Residence" cards. About 5,000 people filled out those cards, Bratt said.

"But some people, like one woman I talked to this morning, didn't know about it. They just picked up and left (the West Coast)," he said.

"In those cases, there is certain basic information that we are looking for," Bratt said, "to determine



KENNY MATSUI/Rafu Shimpō

**Bob Bratt, executive director of the Office of Redress Administration, talks to one of the participants in a Little Tokyo workshop.**

spouses of internees be declared eligible for redress. There are approximately 78 Caucasian spouses who may be eligible, according to Bratt.

The ORA director said most of the cases they are working on for this fiscal year are those involving special verification, those who have some kind of special problems such as those who evacuated "voluntarily" but failed to fill out an official "Change of Residence" form.

After the Executive Order 9066 was passed, if people wanted to leave the West Coast, before the government incarcerated Japanese Americans into internment camps,

exactly when did they leave and who did they leave with. We do require a prudent amount of documentation statements—two statements—from people to corroborate their story."

People who don't have Change of Residence cards on file should get two statements from individuals who have first-hand knowledge of what happened. "We also need a signed affidavit saying 'I declare under penalty of perjury that the above statements are in fact true.'"

That makes it a legal document, he explained, and if there was fraud—there have been only two possible cases of fraud out of

49,500—"we could go into court if we wanted to."

Bratt praised the work of community groups such as the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRR) and Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), community workshop meetings, and the media in getting the information out to the people.

For those seeking redress whose English skills are limited, there are three Japanese-speaking staff members at the Office of Redress Administration who can answer any questions in Japanese, according to Bratt.

Additionally, Cheryl Watanabe of the ORA Helpline in Washington, D.C., Bratt said, also speaks some Japanese and is able to help people.

The ORA chief said that 73 percent of redress recipients are in California, and 10 percent are in the Los Angeles area.

But the West Coast was not the only area where Americans of Japanese ancestry were mistreated. Even in Hawaii, where most people were not incarcerated, some Japanese Americans suffered injustice at the hands of the government.

Bratt revealed that a number of people in Hawaii, farmers living in the Lualualei Valley area near a munitions depot and a radio tower, were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated in government housing elsewhere on Oahu after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Only Japanese Americans were moved and only Nikkei were required to work free for a one day a week to pay for the housing, and only JAs were required to wear badges identifying their ethnic origins.

"So what happened was that we held a workshop and 400 people showed up with stories of 27 different areas where something happened to individuals," the Civil Rights Division executive officer said. "The people of Lualualei were determined to be eligible."

Bratt was also scheduled to hold a workshop in Gardena's Nakaoka Center today, and he was named featured speaker for the Ventura County JACL meeting in Oxnard tonight.