

MOMENTUM

The redress bill was gaining more and more momentum. Then we got the word that there would be a full vote of the House on the bill sometime in July. It was “make or break” because if the House didn’t pass it, we didn’t know what would happen in the Senate. So in July of 1987, we began to gear up for a delegation because we felt, “hey, this was the time, this was the defining moment.” I was still working for Congressman Mervyn Dymally and I was able to go ahead and stay at one of his staffer’s home. With his assistance as well as Norm Mineta’s and Bob Matsui’s, we were able to schedule 101 congressional visits. At home, people were organizing like crazy, publicizing the delegation! We were in daily contact. I would let them know everyday what key Congressional visits had gone on. It was really a coordinated effort and it was just mind blowing. People saved up their money and vacation time to lobby for redress. It was just incredible! Kay came out a day or two early because she was working.



NCCR delegates meet with Congressman Norman Mineta of California

We had this book that had little blurbs about each legislator that could help us as we developed lobbying teams. For example, we knew Alan Cranston was really big on senior citizen issues and he really loved his own constituents from California, so of course, people like Sox Kitashima would be a natural for his team. Barney Frank of Massachusetts had a history of supporting a lot of labor

struggles, so we wanted to put some working people there. Charles Bennett of Florida was a disabled World War II veteran, so of course we had a 442 veteran and in particular, Rudy Tokiwa, who was a disabled veteran. Putting together the teams and the visits were really time consuming because we were not sure until really late as to who was going to go and when they would be here. I remember staying up so late one night that I just crashed out. Kay had to finish it but we managed to set these teams up. It was really something!

We had a big meeting on the first day the delegation arrived. We handed out the schedules and everything. Once we got into the halls of Congress, it was like there were Japanese Americans everywhere. Norm Mineta said that people kept coming up to him and asking, “Is that the Hawaiian delegation?” It was just that! We were all over the place!

Congressman Dymally’s office was the center of our operations. The offices on the Congressional side are small, but we had two people there all the time handling the phone and the press. We were using his phone all day, calling reports.

For example, if people that visited Paul Simon of Illinois had some really good news, then they would come to the office and the press people would call the papers in Illinois to give them that. His number was used as the central phone number for any of the schedules of visits that may have gotten changed. Anyone that got lost from the delegation would go to this office and say “where am I supposed to be and how do I get there?” People got lost from their teams

Miya Iwataki and Congressman Mervin Dymally of California



because there were three buildings and all these real intricate underground tunnels and everything. It was just really crazy for Dymally’s office, but he really stepped up for us!

Miya Iwataki

(Taken from interview for Oral History Project, June 2, 2002)