

LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY

I think all of us were on a lot of lobbying teams, but one team that I really remember was the team I was on with Rudy Tokiwa. We went to see Congressman Charles Bennett, who was a Democrat and the dean of the Florida delegation. That means he was the senior congressman from Florida and when we looked at his bio, we saw that he was a disabled World War II vet and so was Rudy. I know we also had at least two or three additional vets with us. So we were there and we introduced ourselves and the legislation; and the vets started talking about why it was important to support this bill. It was a long meeting and the vets in our group were really articulate but the Congressman was kind of stone faced. When we left the meeting, we were talking and thinking, "God, I don't know, maybe this is going to be a hard one." As we started to walk down the hall, I turned around and I that Congressman Bennett had come out of his side door and had pulled saw Rudy Tokiwa aside and they were talking quietly for a long time. We just waited around for Rudy, but I didn't think much of it at the time.

When the actual vote came down on September 17, we went to watch the vote. There was this huge room inside with rows and rows of seats for the members of Congress. When they vote, there are these green and Red lights of the wall that let you see the numbers. The public is allowed to



Rudy Tokiwa, a 442nd veteran

sit in what they call the Gallery, which is like a level up. We all went to the Gallery, but because Rudy had a cane, they told him that he could sit in the special section for people with disabilities. I didn't want him to be alone, so I went with him ... We Won!!

The next morning, we all met for breakfast and we were going around to Norm Mineta's office and everybody else's office, and Rudy says, "You know, I want to stop in at Congressman Bennetts' office to thank him. So we stopped there but he wasn't in. Later Rudy called him and told him that he was calling to thank him for his vote yesterday. Congressman Bennett said, "Well you know, I wasn't sure I was going to vote with you. In fact I had my staff draft a statement to oppose the bill and a statement to support the bill." He said, "When I walked into the chambers, I still wasn't decided. The young guys kept coming up to me saying, Congressman, how should we vote on this?" He said, "I don't know, let

me think about this. I was standing there and all of a sudden I saw this reflection.” This reflection caught his eye and he said he looked up. It was from Rudy’s cane as he sat in the special disabled section of the Gallery. Congressman Bennett told Rudy, “I saw you up there and thought, aw, hell, I’ll vote for it,” and with his vote, he brought the entire Florida delegation with him. There is a lot of power in putting a human face on an issue. This to me is the example of what lobbying and an advocacy visit can do.

Miya Iwataki

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