

# Reagan Signs H.R. 442

By ROBERT TOKUNAGA  
Hokubei Mainichi

The Japanese American community has been waiting over 35 years for this announcement: The U.S. government has officially apologized to Americans of Japanese ancestry who were forced into internment camps during World War II.

The government will also pay \$20,000 per person in reparations to surviving former internees.

The apology was made official when President Reagan signed the redress bill, H.R. 442, on Wednesday afternoon in the White House Rose Garden.

Attending the signing ceremony was Rep. Norman Mineta (D-Calif.), who was interned at Heart Mountain when he was 10½ years old.

"Today is a moment of great emotion for me, a day when hopes and dreams have become reality," said Mineta in a statement released after the bill was signed.

"Today the unjust burden of shame which 120,000 loyal Americans have carried for 46 painful years has at long last been lifted."

Mineta, Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.), Sen. Spark Matsunaga (D-Hawaii) and Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) were the key members of Congress who guided the redress bill through the ten-year legislative process.

"You have to salute the President today for seeing the importance of this monumental bill," said Matsui, who also attended the signing ceremony.

"He has clearly seen the importance of this measure to our Constitution and everything it stands for," continued the Sacramento congressman. "The commitment of his signature demonstrates that principles of justice can transcend any partisan lines politics may draw up."

"The signing of the bill has begun the healing process for ourselves and the nation," said Jim Kajiwara of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations, which has been campaigning for the passage of the legislation for eight years.

Reagan's signature on the bill "marks a major achievement — the achievement of a measure of justice long denied, and so long overdue," added the NCCR spokesman. "(Former) internees and their families have waited a lifetime for this vindication."

Kajiwara spoke at a press conference held at the national headquarters of the Japanese American Citizens League in San Francisco.

icans), but all Americans have reason to celebrate," he emphasized, "for this symbolic act of redress means to us a renewed commitment to racial understanding and civil rights in our country."

Kajiwara is a native of San Francisco who was interned at Topaz, Utah.

Also attending the press conference was San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos, who proclaimed Aug. 10 "Japanese American Justice Day."

"Today is a day of mixed feelings for most of us Japanese Americans," said Ben Takeshita of the JACL. "There is certainly a great feeling of joy and relief that . . . the end is in sight."

"But for most of us, there is an equal feeling of sorrow and regret today because there were so many who went through the same kinds of hardships and injustices who are not with us any more to share in this day of joy and celebration."

The JACL spokesman, who was interned at Topaz and Tule Lake, Calif., said the signing of the bill restores the honor of the country and of Japanese Americans.

"This was and is a superb example of our democratic process in its purest form," Takeshita declared. "The success of our struggle is proof positive that democracy is still alive and well here in America."

## Token Amount

Under a provision of the bill, each eligible former internee can receive a one-time, lump-sum of payment of \$20,000.

"I would like to emphasize that the \$20,000 awarded to each surviving internee must be considered only a token amount," said Takeshita. "The \$20,000 could not begin to compensate a person for his or her lost freedom, loss of property, loss of livelihood and the stigma of disloyalty."

"The \$20,000 means that the government is sincere in its apology. It is a token payment, yes, but it is a meaningful amount."

Tatsumi Tajima, 74, who was born in Centerville (now called Fremont) and interned at Topaz, said the apology and the payment are welcomed, but the money could not possibly be "payment in full for the losses suffered" by him and other internees.

Tajima lost his farm near Centerville when he was evacu-



Speakers at San Francisco press conference (left) Ben Takeshita, JACL; J. I. Tamaki.

ated. After the war, he went into the produce business and then the floral industry.

The payments will be made in order of date of birth with the oldest surviving former internee on the date of the enactment of the bill (Aug. 10) receiving the first payment.

Congress is to appropriate a set amount of money each year for the next ten years until the youngest former internee receives his or her payment.

Should an eligible person die before receiving the payment, it will go to the individual's spouse, children or parents.

Takeshita reminded supporters of the redress movement that it was not over. "We must continue to work hard to ensure that the appropriations bill for this legislation is passed as soon as possible."

He also noted that there still is much to be done to educate the general public about the camps.

A provision of the bill will set up an education fund for programs to teach Americans about

# 42 Into Law



Press conference included (from left) N. Kajiwara, NCCR; and attorney

*Photo by Kazuyoshi Arai*

the camps and the Constitution.

Several speakers at the press conference noted that in fighting for passage of the bill, they found that even today, the hardest thing for many Americans to do is to distinguish between Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans.

It was ten years ago that the JACL, at its convention in Salt Lake City, launched the drive to get redress from Congress.

Takeshita recalled that many people within the JACL were at first doubtful that the government would apologize, let alone pay compensation.

In an Aug. 1 letter to House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas), Reagan said he would sign the bill in order to "close a sad chapter in American history in a way that reaffirms America's commitment to the preservation of liberty and justice for all."

Reagan's announcement that he would sign the bill ended years of speculation. Even earlier this year, there were indications that he would go along with the recommendations of

the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of Justice, which opposed the bill.

Dale Minami, who moderated the press conference, was asked if he was surprised by Reagan's decision to sign the bill.

"I was not surprised because of events of recent years," answered Minami. "One, it was clear if you could look at the record and see that there was an injustice done to Japanese Americans."

The Sansei attorney felt the President wanted to be the one to correct that injustice.

But more importantly, said Minami, the President's decision to sign the bill was due to political considerations. He noted that the House and Senate had enough or almost enough votes to override a presidential veto.

"You also have a Republican Party that has been struggling to court minority voters," he said, "especially with the presidential elections coming up. If you look at the civil rights record of this administration, there is no reason to believe he would have signed it absent some type of political imperative."

Takeshita remembered a man who, about 20 years ago, came to the JACL with a proposal that the organization start a redress campaign.

When this man made the suggestion, Takeshita recalled, most people did not listen and nobody did anything about it.

As it turned out, a few people did listen and many people eventually did something about it.

The man who made the suggestion was Edison Uno of San Francisco. He died in 1976.

*Part 2 of Hokubei Mainichi's redress chronology appears on page 3 of today's English section.*

## At Long Last