

OTHER WAYS TO WIN

Two years after the tumultuous hearings held in Los Angeles to investigate the causes and reasons for the internment, the Senate decided to get involved. Although we had confidence that we would do well in the House, the Senate was another story. We had no idea on how to reach this august body of people. What we didn't know at the time was that Senator Spark Matsunaga was working the Senate, incredibly receiving enough commitments so that even a Presidential Veto could be defeated! He had won over three quarters of the Senate! We found this out when the affable Senator from Hawaii hosted a reception for us highlighted by home made cookies and sodas when we went on our lobbying trip in 1987. He electrified us with his news! "Don't bother with the Senate, just concentrate your efforts on winning in the House!" I honestly felt for the first time that we did have a chance to win!



Meeting with the Office of Redress Administration in Little Tokyo, Bruce Iwataki, attorney and long time NCRR member, listens in (seated at far right).

The Los Angeles Hearings, conducted by the CWRIC in 1981 was emotionally searing and soul searching. The "dam had broken" and former internees came forward to pour out their bitterness and anger after being silent for so many years. The opposition was present in of all places, the presiding Chair of the commission, Congressman Dan Lundgren and of course, Senator Sam Hayakawa! Lundgren found it difficult to conceal his contempt for the whole process, often openly inattentive and bored, while Senator Hayakawa attacked the testimony of the former internees by remarking that some of the statements "made his skin crawl."

Two years had passed and a Sub-Committee of the Senate, led by Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, a ranking Republican, was going to conduct Hearings in the Los Angeles area. We put our heads together and decided that it was important to win Senator Stevens over and that we should not go "tit for tat," with any of the opposition. I remember our Co-Chair, David Monkawa, making

that point and I thought he looked at me in particular because I had wound up banging my fist on the table and creating an uproar at the Los Angeles Hearings in 1981.

Our strategy of exercising restraint worked well. Some 100 people attended the hearing at the Brentwood Theater in August of 1984, on the grounds of the Veterans Administration of Westwood. The arguments for redress were ably presented by speakers like Congressman Norman Mineta and Dr. Mary Oda. Noted urging passage was Senator Alan Cranston, Congressman, Mervyn Dymally as well as speakers representing the NCRR and the JACL (L.A. Times). Opposition again was provided by Senator Hayakawa, who was quoted as saying that "older Japanese Americans would just as soon forget the whole thing." This was because he believed that the push for redress was primarily the work of young radicals within the Japanese American community. "Redress would set a dangerous precedent," he said. "Once this starts, the American Indians and the Blacks are going to sue. How about redress to all the boys and fathers killed in the war," he asked. A retired U.S Army Colonel surrounded by a cadre of senior citizens in the first two rows grew boisterous when he contended that the passage of a redress bill, based on a study by the CWRIC, would "constitute a solemn public lie!" "The Government should offer a public apology to Japanese Americans only after Japan apologizes for Pearl Harbor." Particularly galling was a tall White lady who strode up and down the aisle disrupting the proceedings with her loud mutterings against redress.

Although we were sorely tempted to go after these racist idiots, their hysterical ramblings and lack of discipline destroyed whatever credibility they may have had. Senator Stevens began to glare at the lady roaming up and down the aisle, and when it came time for the opposition to have it's say, he listened politely only to their first speaker and went on to ignore the others, often turning to talk to an aide while they were rambling on..

Senator Stevens eventually became a supporter of redress. It just goes to show that sometimes you can win by not having to out-shout your opponents. If we showed a lack of discipline and behaved as stupidly as the opposition did, who knows what the outcome of the Senate Hearings in Los Angeles would have been.

Jim H. Matsuoka