

To: The EDITOR

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Head: **Shock and Anger at Deletion of Redress Funds**

2nd: **NCRRC Reaffirms Support for \$500 Million Per Year Funding**

By: John Ota

"Even though we had heard that it was likely, I think many in the community are reacting with shock, anger and frustration at the news that no funds whatsoever will be provided in 1989 appropriations for Japanese American redress," said Bert Nakano, National Spokesperson of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRRC) on May 31. He referred to the May 24 passage by the House of Representatives of a \$3.7 billion supplemental appropriations bill for 1989 after \$250 million for redress had been deleted.

"The significance of the redress law," added Nakano, "was that it reaffirmed the principles of the Constitution, the basic rights that this country is supposed to stand for. Passing that law showed that if our Constitutional rights mean anything, then the government must offer more than an apology -- it must also pay at least token compensation - for its gross and unjustified violation of those rights in 1942."

"Many officials, including then Vice Pres. George Bush and many leaders in Congress hailed the redress law last year with fancy phrases. But many of us are wondering now, Was it all rhetoric? Or have they lost sight of the significance of the law since then?" asked Nakano.

"We are all aware of the budget problems, but we also believe that funding is a question of priorities, and that the government's debt to former internees should be a top priority. It is already 47 years late, too late for the 60,000 or so internees who died before the law was enacted," added Nakano. "People don't understand why Canada has been able to begin sending out checks to Canadian former internees, while in the U.S., no funds have even been appropriated yet, ten months after the redress bill became law."

Just about one year ago, on June 6 in Los Angeles, George Bush declared, "It is only fair that our country provide apologies and reparations to those innocent Japanese Americans interned in prison camps during World War II." However, as President, Bush proposed no funds in 1989 and only \$20 million in 1990 for redress. Furthermore, he threatened to veto the earlier version of the recently passed 1989 supplemental funding bill that included \$250 million for redress.

"The removal of \$250 million in redress funds from the 1989 funding bill means that those who have already waited for over 47 years for the government to redress the suffering and total violation of their Constitutional and human rights, will now have to wait even longer," said Nakano. "With an estimated 200 former internees passing away each

month, close to 2,000 have probably already died since the redress bill was enacted last August."

NCRRC members never thought winning redress funding would be easy. They and members of other redress groups, such as the JACL, mounted an aggressive letter writing and lobbying effort. Since January 1989, over 20,000 confirmed letters from the San Francisco area alone have been sent to members of Congress and President Bush. Thousands more have been sent by NCRRC members in Los Angeles, San Jose, New York and other areas. In fact, more letters have been sent this year than last year when redress supporters were trying to get President Reagan to sign the bill.

In addition, some 600 mailgrams have been sent to Congress on NCRRC's national mailgram hotline. And in early April, seven NCRRC members went to Washington, where they lobbied over 20 members of Congress and testified at a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing.

NCRRC is now turning its main attention to the appropriations for fiscal year 1990, which begins Oct. 1, 1989. "Our position remains that the redress program should be funded at the maximum level of \$500 million per year so that former internees, who average 65 years in age, can be paid as quickly as possible," said Nakano. "This is even more urgent to us now that it appears that 1989 funding is dead. We call on our many supporters in Congress to reaffirm their support for \$500 million per year in redress funding and to bend their utmost efforts to win it."

A recent report from Washington said that House and Senate budget leaders had made a non-binding proposal for \$150 million for redress in 1990 and called for all former internees aged 70 and up to be paid by the end of 1990. An estimated \$350 million would be needed to pay all such individuals.

Nakano commented on this, saying, "We feel that the internees shouldn't have to wait until they are 70 years old to be paid. Many of them won't even make it to 70. But if Congress really wants to pay that age group, then it should at least provide the full amount needed to do so, rather than raise hopes that they may not be able to fulfill."

NCRRC is currently arranging meetings with key supporters in Congress to discuss strategy. Also, NCRRC is launching a renewed letter writing campaign, with new letters focusing on the 1990 appropriations.

For copies of the new letters, contact: **NCRRC, 244 So. San Pedro, Rm. 410, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (213) 620-0761, or 1911 Bush St., #1-G, San Francisco, CA 94115 (415) 922-1534.**