

3/14/88

Draft NCRR Statement for Senate Vote

NCRR WELCOMES SENATE PASSAGE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES ACT OF 1987

The National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) hails the March __ approval of the Civil Liberties Act of 1987 in the U.S. Senate by an overwhelming __ -__ margin. On this occasion we again urge President Reagan to sign the bill into law when it reaches his desk.

The issue is one of long-overdue justice for the estimated 56,000 survivors among the 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were unjustifiably stripped of their constitutional and human rights and incarcerated by the U.S. government in 1942 solely on the basis of their ancestry. The government claimed military necessity, but long after the war, documents were uncovered that showed government officials knew in 1942 that mass internment was unnecessary.

The Senate version of the bill also includes provisions to benefit Aleuts and Pribiloff Islanders who suffered death, disease and grave hardships due to the actions of the U.S. government during World War II. We join with the Aleut and Pribiloff Island communities in calling for these provisions to be included in the bill when it is sent to President Reagan.

The Senate vote showed very clearly that the bill has strong bipartisan support. A majority of both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate voted for the bill, including prominent conservatives, such as Senators Alan Simpson, ^{Orrin Hatch} ~~Robert Dole~~ and Warren Rudman, and prominent liberals, such as Senators Edward Kennedy, Alan Cranston and Paul Simon. Last September 17 the House of Representatives also passed the bill by a large margin -- 243-141 -- with similar bipartisan support.

We give special recognition to Senator Spark Matsunaga for his extraordinary energy, devotion and leadership in bringing about today's long-awaited victory, and special thanks to Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole, and all 75 of the bill's Senate cosponsors for their invaluable support.

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The bill represents over ⁴⁶~~44~~ years of waiting and a decade of active organizing efforts which united Japanese Americans on an unprecedented scale. We in the movement for redress and reparations feel a deep sense of urgency since over half of the original 120,000 Japanese American internees have already passed away. It is our fervent desire that this legislation become law and be implemented without further delay before any more former internees are gone. We regret that those who are gone will never hear an official apology from the government for its gross violation of their rights, and that neither they nor their heirs will benefit from the symbolic and token compensation this bill offers.

Our organization has collected close to 11,000 letter to President Reagan urging him to sign this bill into law and we believe that he has received thousands of other letters as well. For instance, we understand that he has received about 2,800 letters from citizens of Bruyeres, France, who still remember and appreciate the heroic sacrifices of the all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 100th Battalion in liberating their town from Nazi control during World War II. Many of these soldiers fought and died overseas to preserve democracy while their families were being held behind barbed wire under armed guard in the U.S.

We hope that President Reagan will take into account both the historic injustice of the internment and the strong grassroots support for the bill, and sign this measure into law. Such an act would show the world that this country can admit and make amends for its violations of human and Constitutional rights.