

STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT T. MATSUI  
BEFORE THE  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, STATE, AND THE JUDICIARY

MARCH 5, 1989

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today on behalf of this important and far-reaching issue for all Americans.

Without wasting time, I would like to begin by going straight to the heart of this debate.

This debate is not about \$20,000 and it's not about \$500 million. It's not about budgets and it's not about deficits. This debate, Mr. Chairman, is about that wonderful, living document we call the Constitution of the United States. It's about those who wish to fully uphold and renew its spirit and meaning and those who wish to compromise its inherent qualities.

It was no coincidence that the House approved HR 442 on the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. I could think of no finer way to celebrate the birthday of this living, breathing document than to redress a wrong that shattered the lives of thousands of Americans who were unnecessarily incarcerated by their own government forty years ago.

It was a proud day for all Americans. Now we face a new day and a new challenge. The Administration wishes to postpone our commitment to the Constitution by inordinately delaying redress

payments.

First, the Administration is proposing to give the Office of Redress Administration less than half of the funds it has requested to administer redress payments over the next two years. This, Mr. Chairman, is a tragedy. The Justice Department originally requested \$6.4 million in 1989 and \$6.0 million in 1990 to cover the administrative costs of locating and identifying recipients. Instead, the Administration has proposed merely \$2.1 million in 1989 and \$1.4 million in 1990.

The Justice Department has made great gains in locating potential recipients. But those efforts require money. It has already spent \$600,000 this year on contractor support. It uses such private contractors to take in and process all voluntary information. Because of these expenses and the urgency to move forward, I am requesting that the committee approve \$6.4 million in the 1989 Supplemental Appropriations Bill for the Office of Redress Administration's program costs.

The Administration has also moved to postpone our commitment by proposing only \$20 million in 1990 for a payment program that has a funding ceiling of \$500 million.

Mr. Chairman, that funding ceiling of \$500 million was not reached arbitrarily. It was reached after much consideration and compromise. It was formulated around the law's central intent that payments must be made in an expeditious manner, not to exceed ten years from the day of enactment. At the rate of the Administration's proposal, it would take 60 years to make all payments. The majority of surviving internees are among our population's oldest members.

They are in their 70's, 80's and 90's. The Justice Department recently identified a survivor who is 106 years old. Many of these survivors will not be with us in ten years let alone in 60 years.

Approximately 200 survivors of these camps will die every month. They die without their lives as Americans being fully complete. They die without the specter of disloyalty that was so inappropriately placed on them being fully removed.

Furthermore, the Justice Department estimates that it will cost the federal government additional funds to locate the dependents of those who are eligible for payments but die while waiting.

The bottom line is that time is running out on our commitment. The Justice Department has already located over 52,000 possible recipients. To undercut this great effort by ignoring its funding needs would be a terrible tragedy.

The Office of Redress Administration itself originally requested the maximum amount of funds be appropriated in 1989 and 1990 for payments. I am quite confident that its officials knew what they needed and what they could adequately use when they made that request. Any attempt by the Office of Management and Budget to postpone payments until every single recipient is located is completely incongruous with the law's intent.

Mr. Chairman, I ask the committee for its support in appropriating the full funding amount of \$500 million in FY1990 for redress payments. Two hundred years ago, our forefathers envisioned the Constitution to be a living document for all Americans. They never intended its qualities to be compromised. The challenge to uphold that commitment is now up to us.