

Japanese American Citizens League

5415 NORTH CLARK STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60640
(312) 728-7170

WILLIAM J. YOSHINO
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

April 18, 1984

Honorable Charles H. Percy
United States Senate
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Senator Percy:

We thank you very much for the meeting on April 17, 1984 in which we discussed the issue of remedies related to the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans.

A meaningful remedy which includes monetary compensation is important for a variety of reasons. The incarceration of American citizens during World War II resulted in measurable damage and losses to those interned. As evidenced by the testimony of hundreds of former internees during the hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, these individuals lost homes, property, and personal effects. They suffered career and educational disruptions, which in many cases were irretrievable. They suffered humiliation and ostracism and became the victims of misplaced guilt. Moreover and most importantly, these 120,000 internees lost their freedom for periods of up to four years.

In a less personal but larger context, the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II represented a wholesale neglect of the principles upon which this nation was founded. Civil liberties were cast aside in the wake of fervent racism and political expediency. The Constitution and all that it represents became meaningless when applied to an entire group of people. The issue thus remains that in times of national crisis, or for that matter at any time, must groups stand vulnerable to public or political whim in the determination of their civil rights. Our governmental system, which places the highest priority on the protection of individual rights failed in 1942 and few, if any, would say that a similar tragedy would not be repeated in the future given the unfortunate blending of similar circumstances.

A form of monetary compensation is the essence of the issue in remedying the World War II tragedy of Japanese Americans. The manner of payment may be flexed over a period of years with the more elderly designated as the initial recipients. Regardless of the manner in which compensation is determined, however, the real and psychic damages that accrued to those who were interned must somehow be mitigated. The possibilities of future recurrence must somehow be dissipated. There remains an obligation on the part of the government to

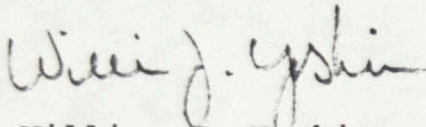
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institute corrective and deterrent measures arising from this issue.

Finally, the issue of compensating Japanese Americans should not be viewed as a competing interest with food programs, budget deficits, and other serious and important matters facing our nation. Instead, this issue must be viewed as an issue which promotes the long term welfare of our country. The principles of our nation remain fixed in a belief in the dignity of the individual and those rights which are basic within a free society. The manner in which we conduct ourselves in amending past errors only serves to strengthen and cement the values of democracy that we would portray to the world community.

We appreciate your kind and sincere words of support in attempting to arrive at a meaningful decision on this issue. We urge you to support the concept of monetary compensation when S.2116 comes before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. Please remain free to contact me should you require additional information.

Respectfully,



William J. Yoshino

WJY/b