

Japanese American Citizens League

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WILLIAM J. YOSHINO
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Individuals
DATE: May 15, 1981

FROM: Bill Yoshino *Bill*
SUBJ: Redress Update

As many of you are aware, the Commission established to investigate the evacuation has been fully composed and is currently in the process of filling appointments to its staff positions. Paul Bannai, former California assemblyman, has been chosen as the commission staff director. At present, we are unaware of the sites and dates for the commission hearings. We anticipate that the next meeting of the commission will enlighten us on this. We are reasonably certain, however, that the first hearing will be held in Washington, D.C.

Further, there have been changes in the redress structure at JACL. Min Yasui now chairs the redress committee and Dr. Clifford Uyeda serves as associate chair. John Tateishi, the former chair of the committee, is JACL's staff coordinator for redress.

The current focus of JACL's efforts ~~is~~^{is} in the area of identifying witnesses willing to testify before the commission. It is imperative that we locate individuals for this purpose as we are reasonably sure that a hearing will be held in Chicago.

Most recently, Min Yasui has sent a formal request to the chair of the commission, Joan Bernstein; that the commission hold hearings in the 10 cities originally purposed by JACL; that interpreters be provided by the commission to accommodate the needs of the Issei; and that the Commission consider all requests for individuals interested in testifying or submitting written testimonies.

Finally, current redress information will regularly be printed on page 2 of the Pacific Citizen.

3/11/81

Citizens league seeks redress

By CAROLYN LENZ
Asst. Managing Editor

KUMAO (ART) YOSHINARI of Rogers Park remembers a winter day 39 years ago as the saddest day of his life.

That February day in 1942, Yoshinari was on a train, being evacuated from his home in Oregon because he was thought to be a security risk. Some 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry suffered a similar fate during the war against Japan.

Yoshinari, who along with most evacuees was an American citizen, could not believe that the American democracy he believed in would expell innocent people from their homes and send them to detention camps solely because of their ancestry.

Then 28, he was president of the Japanese American Citizens League. He and other community leaders were called to meet with U.S. military leaders in San Francisco and asked to cooperate with the evacuation.

"THEY TOLD US if we volunteered to evacuate, we would be paid prevailing wages, and they said all of us would be given a hearing in the assembly centers. Those who were cleared

commission. The commission will reopen investigations of the evacuation and make recommendations to Congress about restitution.

Yasui explained why the JACL is still concerned about something that happened almost 40 years ago. "A wrong that is not corrected always remains a wrong," he said. "There should be redress to make sure this kind of thing never happens to any person."

Equating the holding of American hostages in Iran to detaining Japanese Americans during the war, Yasui said, "If you do this to me, you are weakening the safeguards of all Americans."

Yasui doubted that the evacuees were security risks because one-half were women, one-third were under age 16 and one-fifth were the parent generation. No evidence of disloyalty was found against the able-bodied male evacuees, he said.

MORALE WAS very low in the camps, but Yoshinari decided to make the best of it. He was active on committees established to resolve problems of camp living and conflicts among camp residents. He organized community recreation and sports pro-

would be released," Yoshinari said. JACL leaders agreed to cooperate, partly to prove their loyalty to America.

However, no hearings were ever held, and the so-called prevailing wages paid for work at the detention camps ranged from \$12 to \$19 a month.

Although evacuees were told they were being detained for their own protection from civilians who might harm them, machine guns were pointed toward the camps, not away from them, and barbed wire fences were slanted inward to prevent anyone from getting out, Yoshinari said. A few evacuees who tried to escape were shot to death.

More than half of the Japanese nationals (Issei), who were denied citizenship, and their American-born children (Nisei), who were citizens, were detained as long as four years, from 1942 to 1946. Most lost their property and businesses before and during detention.

NOW, THE JACL is working to obtain redress for those people who were evacuated and their descendants. A national leader in the redress movement, Minoru Yasui, visited the JACL Midwest Regional Office, 5415 N. Clark St., Wednesday, March 4, and spoke at the Midwest Buddhist Temple, 435 W. Menomonee St.

Yasui, an attorney and executive director of the Commission on Community Relations in Denver, is spearheading preparations for public hearings before a nine-member presidential

grams to help the people occupy their time.

The cafeteria meals were so bad that Yoshinari bought groceries at the commissary and cooked his own meals. However, he soon ran out of money and had to depend on non-Japanese friends outside of the compound to bring him groceries.

"I felt I could not live being confined like cattle," Yoshinari said. "I applied to leave camp and got clearance from the FBI."

A FRIEND helped him find a job in Chicago. He recently retired as vice president, of production control with Turtle Wax after 24 years with the company.

Yoshinari does not seek financial retribution for losses during the evacuation "at this late date." Many of the rightful claimants are dead, and others don't need the money, he said.

"We feel Congress should acknowledge the fact that wrong was done to us as American citizens by denying our rights," he said.

Yasui, whose parents lost more than \$350,000 when they were evacuated, does not want the money either. He would like to see Congress establish a scholarship fund in the memory of the Japanese American soldiers who fought and died in the famous 442nd infantry and the evacuated civilians. Scholarships could be given to persons of any race or ethnic group to promote humanity among all people.