

ALAN CRANSTON
CALIFORNIA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

June 3, 1988

Mr. Tim Yishimiga
5605 Capstan Way
Sacramento, California 95822

Dear Mr. Yishimiga,

Thank you for your letter concerning redress to those Americans of Japanese descent who were removed by our government from their homes on the Pacific Coast and interned during World War II. I appreciate the chance to share my views and recall some of the history of this incident.

I firmly believe that unless our government protects each American from unfair and unjust discrimination, ultimately no one's rights will be safe. Individuals should be judged as individuals, not as members of a particular race or class of people. If our government fails to honor this principle, then the freedom of all of us is endangered.

I've always believed that our government's action in relocating and interning those of Japanese descent living on the West Coast during World War II violated the very ideals for which our nation stands and for which it fought so dearly. My involvement in opposing the relocation and detention policy goes back to the very beginning. I worked closely with Eleanor Roosevelt, Archibald MacLeish and then-Attorney General Francis Biddle in trying to dissuade President Roosevelt from taking these Americans from their communities and interning them in so-called relocation camps.

Like many other Americans, many Japanese Americans fought for the United States in the Second World War. These Nisei soldiers returned from the battlefields of Europe as the most distinguished and decorated American combat unit of the war, and from the Pacific theatre as loyal soldiers and officers in military intelligence. Yet even as they fought, their parents, wives and children were held in guarded camps.

The war extracted great sacrifices from all Americans. These were necessary measures to defend our country. But the exclusion and internment policy was a discriminatory hardship imposed upon Japanese Americans without evidence that they were other than law abiding, loyal people. No similar action was taken against Americans of Italian or German descent, for example.

Moreover, the government's action was never justified by military necessity. Not a single documented act of espionage or sabotage by fifth column activity was committed by American Nisei or by resident Japanese aliens on the West Coast. American leaders knew this at the time.

Some of those interned were told that their internment was for their own protection. But they saw clearly that the machine guns and searchlights surrounding the camps faced inward.

More than two-thirds of the internees were American citizens. A few held dual citizenship. The rest were legal U.S. residents, many of whom were prohibited by U.S. law from becoming citizens despite long residence in the country. None of these individuals had the benefit of individual review of their cases or received due process of law.

I was proud to be an original cosponsor of S. 1009. This bill, intended to accept the findings and implement the recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocations and internment of civilians, officially recognizes the grave wrongs against our Japanese American citizens and tries to insure that such action will never reoccur against any group in our society. As you may know, the Senate passed S. 1009 on April 20, 1988.

Many of the victims of internment lost many times the amount to be provided under redress legislation. All suffered the same basic injustice and affront to their civil liberties -- a loss that can never be measured adequately in money. The monetary compensation here is merely a symbolic effort to provide redress and to deter any similar occurrence in the future.

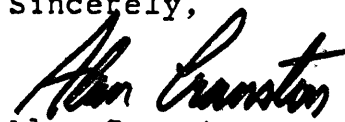
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Redress does not so much involve the present generation's paying for past mistakes as our investing in the future to guarantee our precious liberties for our children.

Enclosed is a copy of my Senate remarks detailing the history of this tragic episode and outlining the provisions of the redress legislation.

~~I deeply appreciate your taking the time to write and express your concerns.~~

Sincerely,


Alan Cranston

Enclosure