

The Sacramento Union

1988 Year Vol. 375

Sacramento, California/OLDEST DAILY IN THE WEST/Friday, August 5, 1988

FINAL HOME EDITION

Japanese internment bill passes

Survivors of WWII camps to receive apologies, \$20,000 tax free

By **LEE GOULD**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The House passed and sent to President Reagan on Thursday legislation providing apologies and \$20,000 tax-free payments to Japanese-American survivors of World War II internment camps.

Reagan has said he will sign the bill,

ending "a sad chapter in American history in a way that reaffirms America's commitment to the preservation of liberty and justice for all."

Approval came on a 257-156 vote, with supporters saying the apology would have been an empty one without cash payments. Opponents argued that America faced a grave threat with the outbreak of war and that mistakes were made and many other

lives disrupted.

About 60,000 people are eligible for the lump-sum payments, but the government will have 10 years to make all the payments totalling \$1.25 billion. The elderly will be given priority, but the first people likely won't be paid until January 1990. Those living at the time the bill is signed qualify, and only their immediate family can collect if they die before payment. No

payments will be made to the families of those who have died before the bill is signed.

More than 120,000 Japanese-Americans were sent to internment camps beginning in 1942 and ending early in 1946. A federal commission that originally recommended the payments in 1982 estimated that about

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Woman happy to see U.S. apologize

By J. P. VETTRAINO
SACRAMENTO UNION STAFF WRITER

Mary Tsukamoto never believed she would live to see her country apologize for the humiliation it heaped upon her and her family.

Legislation approved by the House of Representatives Thursday authorizes payment of \$20,000 to Japanese Americans interned in camps during World War II.

But for 73-year-old Tsukamoto — a school teacher in Elk Grove 26 years and author of a comprehensive work on the internment — the money means "very little."

With the money will come a formal statement that the U.S. government was wrong to round up 120,000 Japanese Americans in their homes

and keep them penned in the camps several years.

"We are very grateful and I'm glad I'm alive this day," Tsukamoto said. "It's been 46 years since that humiliating time. So many are dead — so many boys killed fighting while their families were in camps. I wish could tell them all."

Sacramento's Japanese community is one of the nation's oldest. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, Tsukamoto and her husband were among 2,500 who owned and operated farms in the Florin area.

She and her husband spent three years moving from camp to camp. They were "fortunate," she said, because a friend cared for their farm while they were away. Many came home to find their homes and

property stolen or destroyed.

Any living American citizen or resident alien who spent time in the camps is entitled to the payment, according to Cindy Kettmann, aide to Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento. If an eligible person dies after the bill becomes law, the person's descendants could be entitled to the \$20,000.

Those eligible include some members of Congress, including Matsui and Rep. Norman Mineta, D-San Jose.

Both voted in favor of the legislation Wednesday, as did Rep. Vic Fazio, D-West Sacramento. Rep. Norman Shumway, R-Stockton, voted against the redress payment.

Tsukamoto has campaigned for recognition of the wrong done her

and other Japanese Americans. Last year, she published "We The People: The Story of Internment in America." The book is now in its second printing.

In 1978, Tsukamoto joined "two busloads" of Sacramentans who testified before a presidential commission in San Francisco. That commission concluded the internment was a case of "race prejudice and war hysteria."

"America and democracy has won out," Tsukamoto said Thursday. "The Constitution was stained when we were so poorly treated. Now the Constitution is honored."

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60,000 survive.

One of those survivors is Rep. Norman Y. Mineta, D-Calif., who was 10 years old when he and his parents were sent to a camp at Santa Anita racetrack in Southern California in 1942.

"Though this is a deeply personal issue for myself and a comparatively small number of Americans, this legislation touches the heart and soul of what it means to be an American, and, therefore, the very core of our nation," said Mineta, who sat in the speaker's chair for the vote.

"I sense history in the making," Ben Blaz, the delegate from Guam, told the House before the vote. Blaz said that he, Mineta and Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Calif., "were all incarcerated in our youths, but there was

one difference. My guards were enemy soldiers. Theirs were American soldiers."

Rep. Bill Frenzel, R-Minn., an early opponent of the reparations, said he changed his mind and supported the bill because "I see this as an important national apology... It is a time for apology and reunification and I intend to be a part of it."

But Rep. Howard Coble, R-N.C., said "I can argue that in a time of war when a country is threatened for its very survival, as this country was, many things happened and many lives were disrupted for many reasons."

Rep. Helen Delich Bentley, R-Md., said her husband was a Korean War veteran and that he told her "if you want a fast divorce you vote for that legislation." Bentley said she, her husband and other veterans opposed the bill.

In addition to benefiting Japanese-American internees, the legislation authorizes payments of up to \$12,000 for surviving members of the Aleut Indian tribes who were removed from the Aleutian Islands during the Japanese attack on those islands in 1942.

It was early in 1942 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an order that said the War Department could designate military areas from which people could be excluded.

Later military orders resulted in the exclusion of all people of Japanese ancestry from California, Washington and Oregon, and some in Hawaii. The orders affected 77,000 U.S. citizens and 43,000 legal and illegal resident aliens. All were taken to prison camps in the Western states. The last camp was closed in January 1946.