



Internee payments approved

House backs apology, cash to WWII victims

By David Whitney
Bee Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The House approved a bill Thursday extending a national apology and cash compensation to Japanese-Americans and Alaska Natives removed from their homes and interned during World War II.

The vote sends the \$1.25 billion reparations package to the White House. President Reagan notified House leaders this week that he will sign the bill.

"I don't know if the scars could ever be removed from anyone who has been interned, but I think the healing process has been completed," said Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Sacramento, who was interned as a child.

"The issue of monetary compensation is significant in that we needed the government to acknowledge to each individual that he was not at fault," Matsui said. "But the amount and timing is not really relevant."

An estimated 60,000 surviving Japanese-Americans and about 450 Alaska Aleuts will become eligible for cash payments on the date of the bill's signing.

Japanese-Americans will receive \$20,000 each. Aleuts will receive \$12,500 each.

The difference reflects findings that while the Japanese-Americans' evacuation was not militarily justified, there was reason to remove the Aleuts because their homeland had been attacked.

The legislation requires the Justice Department to begin combing records to identify and locate those who were interned under an evacuation order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt three months after the

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bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Many of the 120,000 Japanese-American evacuees were given less than 48 hours notice to dispose of their personal property.

Congress will have to approve the money for the payments, which could be spread out over as long as 10 years. No more than \$500 million could be appropriated in any one year.

Rep. Norm Mineta, D-San Jose, a Japanese-American who spent two years in a Wyoming relocation camp, said he doubts any payments will be made before January 1990.

He said it will take at least that long for the Justice Department to write rules for the program and identify and locate survivors, but some work can begin immediately.

Payments will go first to the oldest survivors. If a survivor dies before receiving a check, the money will go to a spouse, parents or children.

If there are no such survivors, payments will revert to a trust fund designed in part to publicize the civil-rights abuses to ensure they don't occur again.

Mineta and Matsui technically could qualify for \$20,000 payments under the bill.

Matsui said that because his vote for the legislation might be construed as a conflict of interest, he will not accept the payment.

Mineta last summer voted "present" because he had planned to accept the money for donation to a charity. But he voted for the measure Thursday, saying afterward that it was unclear whether he will be able to accept the payment.

Although the bill requires the Justice Department to find qualified recipients, there also will be an office created to which applications for compensation can be filed.

The House vote Thursday, like those before it, followed a debate in which the chief concern of opponents was not the extension of a national apology, but the cost of the compensation payments.

"I do not see the remedy, the payment of \$20,000, as the right answer to the equation," said Rep. Norm Mineta, R-Stockton. "Search my conscience and the facts as I might, I simply do not find the justification for that."

But Mineta, the last member to speak, passionately defended the legislation. "Though this is a deeply personal issue for a small number, this legislation touches all of us because it touches the very core of our nation," he said.

"Does our Constitution indeed protect all of us, regardless of race or age? Do our rights truly remain inalienable, even in times of stress—and especially in times of stress?" he asked. "The passage of this legislation answers these questions with a resounding 'yes,'" Mineta said.

Several lawmakers reversed their earlier opposition. Among them was Rep. Dan Lungren, R-Long Beach, who had been a leading critic.

Lungren said after the vote that he always has supported extending an apology to the interned citizens.

"I had hoped to be able to remove the individual payments," he said. "I gave it my best shot, but I was not successful. I thought it was more important to vote for the bill because of the symbol involved rather than the money."