

Japanese internee reparations in doubt

WASHINGTON (MNS) — Two months ago, when the nation was in the midst of celebrating the U.S. Constitution bicentennial, legislation to compensate tens of thousands of Japanese Americans and Alaska Natives for forced internment during World War II seemed all but certain of congressional enactment.

The House passed a \$1.25 billion reparations bill Sept 17 — the 200th anniversary of the Constitution signing in Philadelphia.

The redress bill offers a congressional apology and \$20,000 each to 60,000 surviving Japanese-Americans who were rounded up from their homes and held with their families for up to three and a half years in camps behind barbed wire.

Two weeks later, the House Judiciary Committee approved a bill giving about \$26.9 million in lesser individual sums to surviving Aleut Natives in Alaska, whose civil rights were similarly abrogated under a government policy attributed in 1984 by a presidential commission to "racial prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

With both compensation packages wrapped into a single Senate version co-sponsored by three-quarters of the chamber and endorsed by both Republican and Democratic leaders, speedy congressional enactment seemed assured.

But that was two months ago.

Since then, the Oct. 19 "Black Monday" plunge of stock markets worldwide has put pressure on the U.S. government to drastically reduce its deficit spending, diverting attention of lawmakers away

from expensive civil rights initiatives and worrying some reparations proponents that time has run out for them this year.

"Given the fact that the Congress is aiming at a Dec. 16 adjournment, and given another big reality that the budget deficit must be worked out, I am not sure it would be appropriate for us to be pushing on our bill at this time," said Grayce Uyehara, executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League's legislative education committee, the 28,000-member organization's lobbying arm.

"Redress is a big issue for Japanese-American

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survivors and for America, but I am not sure everyone sees it in that manner now," she said. "We are really struggling at the present time. And as we move along, it gets harder."

It is getting harder, she said, because of time and money — and in that order.

Congress must enact major budget and spending bills in the next two or three weeks before adjournment. Even if there were broad agreement that nearly \$1.3 billion could be squeezed out over the next

several years to pay for the reparations bill, there may not be enough time left for Congress to approve it.

Neither are there any assurances from the White House that President Reagan would sign such a bill.

Sen. Spark Matsunaga, D-Hawaii, author of the Senate bill, has been working furiously to persuade Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., to lift his opposition to the measure so that it can be brought up on the Senate floor under a unanimously approved time agreement.

Last month, Helms rejected Matsunaga's request for a two-hour, no-amendments agreement for the bill's consideration.

Elma Henderson, Matsunaga's legislative assistant, said Monday that Helms scuttled the time agreement because he had been receiving "negative mail" concerning the legislation.

Henderson said Helms had told Matsunaga that the letters questioned why the U.S. government should be paying the "Japs." Matsunaga tried to convince Helms that the recipients would be U.S. citizens whose civil rights had been violated by their own government.

Helms still is considering the legislation, Henderson said.

Barbara Luken, Helms' press aide, said Monday that the conservative Republican still was flatly opposed to the \$1.3 billion price tag of the legislation.

Meanwhile, a broad effort has been carried out over the last several months to persuade Reagan to

sign a reparations bill.

Henderson and Uyehara said influential supporters of the reparations bill had met personally with Reagan but both refused to say who those supporters were.

Henderson would say only that Matsunaga had met with White House Chief of Staff Howard Baker, former Senate majority leader, and that he had expressed support for the bill.

"Baker told the senator that if he were still in the Senate, he'd be a co-sponsor of the bill," Henderson

Conservative Sen. Jesse Helms has said he's received letters questioning why the U.S. government should be paying the 'Japs' *This man is senile!*

said.

But without a firm commitment of support from Reagan, the bill's proponents are reluctant to press forward for a vote in the Senate and a possible showdown with Helms, who they fear might stage a filibuster.

The House passed the reparations measure 243-141, which is short of the two-thirds margin needed to override a presidential veto. If all 435 House members were present for the vote, 290 would be needed to override.