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JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE (JACL)

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DILLON MYER, WARTIME RELOCATION DIRECTOR, TO ADDRESS NATIONAL JACL CONVENTION

SEATTLE, WASH., JUNE 8 -- Dillon S. Myer, of Washington D. C., director of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) during World War II, will be the guest speaker at the Pioneer Banquet of the 17th Biennial National Convention of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), which will be held in the Grand Ballroom of the Olympic Hotel on Friday, evening, July 27, according to James Matsuoka, convention chairman.

The WRA was the special agency established by then President Roosevelt in the spring of 1942 to administer the War Relocation Centers to which the Army evacuated some 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from their homes and associations on the West Coast and to supervise their relocation into so-called normal communities outside the evacuated areas.

The Pioneer Banquet, which will be a feature of the July 26 to 30 National JACL Convention, will honor the immigrant Japanese who came to the United States fifty or more years ago, many through the Port of Seattle, to make their contributions to the development of the American West.

Recalling that the mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from their homes and associations on the Pacific Coast took place under military orders 20 years ago, Matsuoka noted that it was most appropriate that the person who had so much to do with the wartime treatment of the Japanese in this country during that most tragic period would address the pioneer immigrant Japanese, many of whom were also evacuees and personally admired the manner in which Myer had administered a most difficult responsibility.

He recalled that in June 1946 the National JACL had presented a scroll of appreciation to Myer at a special New York testimonial banquet. He quoted from the JACL Reporter, then the national membership publication, that "In presenting the testimonial scroll on behalf of the National Organization, Mike Masaoka, National Secretary, declared that Myer probably did more to make endurable the hardships and sacrifices attendant to evacuation, relocation in government centers, and resettlement in normal communities than any other single individual. Masaoka pointed out that while some might say that Myer was merely doing what he was paid to do, in actual fact he went far out of his way to make life as comfortable as possible for the evacuees, even at the risk of his job and in spite of threats against his person. As one who probably knew more of the real worth and work of the WRA than any other Nisei, Masaoka stated that in his considered judgment Dillon Myer did more for the benefit of the Japanese in this country and for our future than most of us will ever realize!"

The scroll "from the JACL and its friends" paid tribute to Myer as a "champion of human rights and decency", noting that the agency director "had capably and ably administered the WRA under the most difficult of circumstances and against the most vicious of opposition in a manner which commended him to the American people and to the evacuee population."

Among those who sent commendatory messages to that 1946 testimonial, according to Matsuoka, were Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, Secretary of the Interior J. A. Krug, Undersecretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman, Attorney General Tom Clark, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Senators David Walsh of Massachusetts, Elbert D. Thomas and Abe Murdock of Utah, and James Mead of New York.

Myer, now 71, is serving as consultant to the Agency for International Development. Long associated with the Department of Agriculture, he was the assistant administrator of Agricultural Conservation and Adjustment Administration of the USDA when then President Roosevelt appointed him director of the newly organized WRA in the spring of 1942. After the liquidation of WRA in the summer of 1946, Myer served as the Commissioner of the Federal Public Housing Authority, President of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs, and as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. More recently, he has been a Senior Expert in Public Administration for the United Nations, the interim director of the Cuban Refugee Program of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and an advisor to the Korean Government in the field of public works.

Chairman Matsuoka also announced that Mike Masaoka, now the Washington JACL Representative, would introduce Myer to the Banquet audience. Takeshi Kubota, former Seattle JACL Chapter President, will be the toastmaster. Frank F. Chuman, National JACL President, Los Angeles, California, will extend the official greetings of the organization to the Issei pioneers and present them with certificates of appreciation. Genji Mihara, president of the Japanese Community Service of Seattle, will respond on behalf of the Issei pioneers.

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