

STATEMENT OF MAS FUKAI

To the Senate Subcommittee on Civil Service,
Post Office, and General Services

HEARINGS ON SENATE BILL S.2116

August 16, 1984

To accept the findings and to implement the
recommendations of the cause of wartime
relocation and internment of civilians.

Hearings at the Brentwood Theatre of
the Veterans Administration Medical Center
Los Angeles, California

STATEMENT BY MAS FUKAI
REDRESS AND REPARATION HEARINGS

MY NAME IS MAS FUKAI. I AM A CITY COUNCILMAN IN THE CITY OF GARDENA, A CITY OF 47,000 PEOPLE, A CITY WITH THE LARGEST CONCENTRATION OF AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY PER CAPITA IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES. I AM ALSO ASSISTANT CHIEF DEPUTY TO KENNETH HAHN, THE SENIOR MEMBER OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS.

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE VERY CITY WHICH I HAVE REPRESENTED AS A COUNCILMAN FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS. THE VERY CITY THAT I WAS FORCED TO LEAVE BY THE GOVERNMENT IN 1942 BECAUSE OF MY RACE.

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON AUGUST 4, 1981, HERE IN LOS ANGELES, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER CITIZENS. I WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THE CONCLUSION OF THE COMMISSION'S FINDINGS WHICH ARE NOW AGAIN BEING DISCUSSED BY THIS VERY IMPORTANT SUB-COMMITTEE. IT WAS MY HOPE THAT FROM THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSION, THE SENATE IN THE HOUSE WOULD ACT QUICKLY TO RESOLVE THE INJUSTICE THAT WAS DONE SOME 42 YEARS AGO. I SAY THIS BECAUSE WITH EACH DAY OF DELAY WE ARE LOSING MANY OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO WERE DEPRIVED OF THEIR DIGNITY. EVEN IN TODAY'S PAPER, I SEE SIX NAMES IN THE JAPANESE NEWS MEDIA OBITUARIES WHO HAVE PASSED ON. I BELIEVE THAT THIS ISSUE SHOULD BE ONE OF THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES OF OUR REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON, D.C. I WANT TO THANK CONGRESSMAN DYMALLY FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY BEFORE YOU TODAY. I FEEL COMPELLED TO SPEAK AND TO SHOW MY APPRECIATION TO HIM AND THE MANY VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE SPENT MANY HOURS BRINGING THIS VERY IMPORTANT ISSUE BEFORE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

WE, AS OLDER JAPANESE AMERICANS, HAVE BEEN CRITICIZED IN THE PAST BY OUR YOUNG PEOPLE--WHY WE NEVER FOUGHT OR SPOKE UP ON THIS UNFORGIVEABLE ACTION. IT IS A CREDIT TO THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, WHO HAD TO BITE THEIR TONGUES AND IGNORE THE MASS PREJUDICE AND HOSTILITY WHICH SPREAD THROUGHOUT POST-WAR AMERICAN SOCIETY--THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO PAINFULLY

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SWALLOW THEIR PRIDE TO FIGHT FOR AND TO WORK FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THEMSELVES AND THIS COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT AN EASY TASK, I WELCOME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK UP. THIS HEARING IS A NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE THAT WILL IMPACT ON ALL AMERICANS--NOT JUST THOSE OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY. IF IT HAPPENED TO US, IT COULD HAPPEN TO ANYONE: GERMANS, IRISH, ITALIANS, CATHOLICS, JEWS, ENGLISH OR PROTESTANTS. IT COULD HAPPEN TODAY, IN FACT, TO ANY MEMBER OF THIS PANEL.

FIRST, LET ME SAY THAT THE FUKAI FAMILY EXPERIENCE DOES NOT DIFFER FROM THE OTHER 120,000 JAPANESE AMERICANS THAT WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES. WE WERE RELOCATED TO THE TULARE FAIR GROUNDS "ASSEMBLY CENTER." AFTER A THREE-MONTH DETENTION THERE, WE WERE PERMANENTLY RELOCATED TO THE GILA RIVER CONCENTRATION CAMP IN ARIZONA. I LIVED IN BLOCK 72, BARRACK 12, UNIT C FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS AND CONFINED BEHIND BARBED WIRE FENCING.

WE WERE AMERICAN CITIZENS, BUT WE WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THE WEST COAST AND PUT INTO CONCENTRATION CAMPS AND THREE YEARS LATER WERE FORCED TO LEAVE WITH NOWHERE TO GO. IT HAD A GREAT IMPACT ON EVERYONE.

MY WIFE, ALSO A U.S. CITIZEN, AND HER FAMILY WERE EVACUATED TO ARKANSAS VIA SANTA ANITA RACE TRACK. THEY RECEIVED A TELEGRAM, SUPPOSEDLY FROM JAPAN, THAT HER FAMILY WAS BEING CALLED BACK TO JAPAN DURING THE WAR AND THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT HAD NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO SEND THEM BACK. UPON REACHING THERE, TO THEIR SURPRISE, THEY DISCOVERED THAT THEIR FAMILY HAD BEEN EXCHANGED FOR THE RETURN OF ANOTHER FAMILY TO THE UNITED STATES. HER FATHER WAS KILLED BY THE ATOMIC BOMB AT HIROSHIMA. HER MOTHER AND FAMILY WERE 20 MILES FROM THE BOMB SITE. I AM LED TO BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS NOT AN ISOLATED CASE. IT IS CERTAINLY AN AREA THAT THIS COMMISSION SHOULD INVESTIGATE.

SECONDLY, THE JAPANESE-AMERICANS WERE SENT TO CAMP FOR NO REASON. MY BROTHER VOLUNTEERED FOR THE SERVICE IN 1943 FROM CAMP. I WAS DRAFTED BY THE ARMY IN 1945. YET, WHILE WE WERE BOTH SERVING OUR COUNTRY,

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OUR FAMILY WAS BEING FORCIBLY DETAINED BY THE SAME COUNTRY FOR WHICH WE WERE FIGHTING.

FINALLY, MY PARENTS HAD A DREAM TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A GOOD LIFE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. THEY TAUGHT ME WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG THAT I HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO GET A GOOD EDUCATION. HOWEVER, IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO GO TO SCHOOL IN BARRACK CLASSROOMS WITH UNCERTIFIED TEACHERS. MY FUTURE WAS UNCERTAIN. UNKNOWN THREATS CONSTANTLY LOOMED OVER ME AND EVEN THE ABILITY TO STAY IN MY OWN COUNTRY, THE COUNTRY OF MY BIRTH, WAS UNSURE.

BECAUSE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES TAKEN AWAY WHEN WE RETURNED FROM CAMP AND THE SERVICE, THE ONLY WORK THAT WE COULD FIND WAS SERVANT TYPE LABOR-- GARDENERS, HOUSEBOYS, BUSBOYS, JANITORS, DISHWASHERS, ETC. MOM WORKED IN A FISH CANNERY ON TERMINAL ISLAND UNTIL SHE WAS IN HER 70's TO HELP PROVIDE. MY FATHER WAS UNABLE TO WORK.

PERHAPS THE THING THAT AFFECTS ME MOST AS A RESULT OF THIS ORDEAL IS THAT I BELIEVE MY MOTHER AND FATHER DIED VERY SAD AND UNFULFILLED, FEELING THAT THEIR DREAMS REALLY HAD NOT COME TRUE. THEIR CHANCE TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS AND GOALS HAD BEEN CRUSHED BY UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND ILLEGAL ACTION OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT--ITS CRUEL ACTION OF FORCIBLY REMOVING US FROM OUR HOMES--AND BY THE OVER-REACTION AND PARANOID, INHUMAN CREATION OF THE DETENTION CAMPS. IN 1955, MY FATHER, FEELING HE WAS A FAILURE AND A BURDEN ON HIS CHILDREN, DIED OF A BROKEN HEART.

ALL THIS LEADS TO THE REASON THAT WE ARE HERE TODAY.

ONE REASON THAT THIS HEARING IS IMPORTANT IS THAT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AND THERE REMAINS TODAY, IN 1984, AN UNDERCURRENT OF DISCRIMINATION IN AMERICA.

IN THE RECENT OLYMPIC GAMES, A YOUNG OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST FROM SOUTH DAKOTA, ON TELEVISION, IN FRONT OF THE WORLD, REFERRED TO THE JAPANESE AS JAPS. THE "ANTI-JAP" MOOD IS STILL HERE. I BELIEVE WITH THIS ISSUE, IT IS

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TIME TO FIGHT IT HEAD-ON. GOOD WILL COME FROM REDRESS AND REPARATION. IT WILL GIVE TO THE YOUNG OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC A CHANCE TO BECOME BETTER EDUCATED IN REGARDS TO AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY.

IN MY TESTIMONY TO THE COMMISSION, I FELT CONFIDENT THAT WHEN BY LOOKING AT THE FACTS, THE TRUTH WILL PREVAIL AND THE RESULT WILL BE A FAIR AND JUST DECISION. I FEEL JUST AS CONFIDENT SPEAKING TO THIS PANEL.

THOSE YEARS IN CAMP SET AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY BACK AT LEAST 20 YEARS. IS THE GOVERNMENT NOW TO TURN ITS BACK TO THE PLEA OF THESE PEOPLE? IS THE GOVERNMENT NOW TO PENALIZE THESE SAME PEOPLE FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND INNER FORTITUDE BY SHRUGGING OFF THE ISSUE OF COMPENSATION AND REPARATION AS UNNECESSARY OR BELATED? WE MUST REMEMBER: THE ISSUE IS THE TREATMENT AND HUMILIATION OF AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY, NOT OF PEOPLE FROM JAPAN. YOUR DECISION WILL BE A SIGN TO ALL AMERICANS AS TO HOW THEIR GOVERNMENT FEELS ABOUT ITS CITIZENS.

I DO NOT BELIEVE A PIECE OF PAPER SAYING "I'M SORRY" IS ENOUGH.

I WANT TO BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION THE PREVAILING STEREOTYPE THAT ALL AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY ARE SUCCESSFUL AND AFFLUENT. THIS IS A MYTH. WE HAVE MANY PEOPLE WORKING 10 - 14 HOURS A DAY. MANY HOLD TWO JOBS WITH BOTH PARENTS WORKING. MANY OLDER NISEI WHO HOLD JOBS ARE BEING FORCED TO RETIRE WITH VERY LITTLE INCOME. MANY SENIOR CITIZENS ARE IN CONVALESCENT HOMES. THE MAJORITY ARE DEPENDENT ON THEIR CHILDREN. FOR MANY, THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN LIFE WAS THE THREE YEARS IN THE DETENTION CAMPS.

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OWES THE AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY COMPENSATION FOR LOST OPPORTUNITIES, LOST PROPERTY, LOST SECURITY, AND

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LOST SELF-ESTEEM. BUT MOST OF ALL, THE GOVERNMENT OWES COMPENSATION FOR
THE LOSS OF REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPAL OF EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER THE LAW FOR
ALL PEOPLE UPON WHICH THIS COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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AUGUST 16, 1984