



(Staff photo by Dean Spuler)

Ken Inaba says money wouldn't compensate the kinds of losses his and other families experienced

## Compensation Support has grown to repay victims of relocation camps

*I am proud that I am an American Citizen of Japanese ancestry for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this nation. I believe in her institutions, ideals and traditions.*

*Although some people may discriminate against me, I shall never become bitter or lose faith ... I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and the attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics.*

— The 1940 creed of the Japanese-American Citizens League.

By ANGELO BRUSCAS

Of the Herald-Republic  
(Last in a series)

The U.S. government still has a file on Wapato's Ray Yamamoto that dates back to the start of World War II. It is 120 pages long, officially authorized and thick with innuendos that have never been challenged or made public.

Although many of the documents still haunt him today, Yamamoto said they also serve as the most important examples of why he has pledged his support to the nationwide case for redress — a movement to get the federal government to compensate for forcing more

than 100,000 Japanese-Americans to spend up to three and a half years in concentration camps.

"It's no laughing matter," said Yamamoto, who lived in Fife, but also owned property in the Lower Valley when he was sent to the Minidoka concentration camp in Idaho at age 28.

"This (the government file) is

leave their homes with only a few days notice and could take only what they could carry with them," according to a booklet issued in May by the Japanese-American Citizens League. "Property had to be hurriedly sold, abandoned, given away, left in insecure storage or unpredictable trusts.

"Crops were left unharvested.

after the last concentration camps were closed, those losses have still gone unrecognized and the debts remain unpaid.

A bill setting up a study commission has been signed by President Carter, and hearings on the redress issue will probably begin early next year around the country.

Ultimately, the commission will decide if the treatment of Japanese-Americans during the war was fair and constitutional.

Besides the commission hearings on the "relocation," other major proposals for redress include a bill to provide compensation of \$15,000 for each person who was forced into one of the 10 camps, plus \$15 for every day they spent there.

The JACL, leading the campaign for redress, has estimated that people forced into the concentration camps had a combined minimum property loss of \$400 million.

Yamamoto, like many of the other Japanese-Americans in the Yakima area, said he fully supports the efforts of the JACL and others in the redress movement.

"I'm pretty active in this redress thing," he said. "I'm one who is really interested in it because there was a time when I never liked it."

(See REDRESS, Page 5)

### CAPTIVES IN THEIR OWN LAND



what really opened my eyes," he said. "It got me mad and now I'm going to push as hard as I can for redress."

The case for redress began with the initial incarceration of most West Coast Japanese after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941.

"Japanese-Americans had to

Many lost titles to homes, business and farmlands because taxes and mortgage payments became impossible to pay. Most bank accounts had already been frozen or confiscated as enemy assets, and there was little source of income within the camps."

But until recently, about 35 years

## Trying not to repeat mistakes of the past

By ANGELO BRUSCAS

Of the Herald-Republic

The issue of redress for the Japanese-Americans who spent up to four years in concentration camps is just now coming into focus after years of virtual obscurity.

Sparked by the Japanese American Citizens League, congressional action is now under way on a \$1.5 million bill to study the apparent injustices of the evacuation and its effect on the Japanese people.

The bill was signed by President Carter on July 31.

Many other proposals are still in the works, including one to provide \$15,000 for every person who was evacuated during the war, plus \$15 for every day spent in the camp. If that bill passed, the total to be paid has been estimated at more than \$3 billion.

In addition, many Japanese-Americans want Congress to request new hearings on post-war Supreme Court decisions that ruled

that the entire relocation and incarceration was a legal procedure.

Although the voices for the redress have been many in recent years, the objections to the mass incarceration of West Coast Japanese dates back to the World War II era.

"One hundred thousand persons were sent to concentration camps on a record which wouldn't support a conviction for stealing a dog," said Yale Professor of Law Eugene V. Rostow in Harper's Magazine in September 1945.

But today, the entire issue remains unsettled.

As leaders in the redress movement, the JACL has an ongoing national committee which has been instrumental in lobbying for some form of compensation.

The committee's initial priorities were to see that the congressional commission bill was passed to "seek remedial legislation as a means of promoting human rights and upholding the Constitution of the United States.

"We call upon the Congress,

through the investigations of the commission, to rectify a mistake of the past so that we, as a nation, will continue as the best hope for mankind," according to the JACL committee's redress position statement. "And further, that the Congress will signal to all the people of the world that the United States does indeed carry out in practice the ideals of democracy."

Ron Ikejiri, JACL lobbyist in Washington, D.C., said the congressional commission has not yet been appointed. In addition, the appropriation bill for the study has not been passed in its final form, he said.

"We're optimistically cautious that it will all be passed in the last session this year," he said. "We have had support from both sides of the political fence, Republican and Democrat."

Once the 15 commission members are appointed and the money is appropriated, hearings will be set up around the country to

review the evacuation order and the losses it caused.

Ikejiri said hearings might be held in Seattle, Portland and Spokane.

In the past few years, as the redress issue has become more and more a focal point for the Japanese community, an increasing number of government officials have also joined in a sympathetic effort to rectify past actions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this was on Feb. 19, 1976 — exactly 34 years after Executive Order 9066 had sent more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans into captivity.

On that date, President Gerald Ford rescinded the order with the following statement:

"An honest reckoning must include a recognition of our national mistakes as well as our national achievements. Learning from our mistakes is not pleasant, but as a great philosopher once admonished, we must do so if we want to avoid repeating them."



# Redress/ from page 3

That time was before he found out what the government had secretly filed away about him in a number of previously undisclosed documents.

Starting about a year ago, Yamamoto began to request the documents under the Freedom of Information Act. He also hired an attorney in Washington, D.C., to help him in his efforts.

Finally, after complying with a complex set of regulations and procedures, the documents, with a few deletions, were sent to Yamamoto.

Perhaps one of the most startling of all was one paper which accused him of being a Japanese leader and implied that he was a danger to the nation's security.

The document, signed March 9, 1942 by the Port Intelligence Officer at the Seattle Port of Embarkation, states:

"The following is a list of Japanese turned into this agent by (name blacked out). They are reported to be 'King Pin Japs' and they receive orders from (name blacked out) who has lived with these Japs for years and is considered a competent authority on the Jap situation."

Yamamoto, who had lived a fairly normal life in the Tacoma area and who had attended Stanford University before the war, is third on the list of the "King Pin Japs."

"That's an accusation in writing that I had no defense against," he said. "It's no wonder we were thrown into jail with these kind of things."

Because of the documents, Yamamoto added that his mind has changed drastically on the redress issue.

"Before I found the government documents, I thought the redress issue was purely political," he said. "In fact, if I don't get a reasonable amount, I intend to follow it through with a class action suit."

Although few other Japanese-Americans in the Yakima area have gone to such an extent to uncover information about the government's actions during the war, most say that some form of disclosure, retribution and public reckoning is long overdue.

"It's so easy for people to forget, just like the Hebrews in the Bible who would forget to obey God over and over until some great tragedy would happen," said Herb Iseri, who was incarcerated in the Heart Mountain, Wyo., concentration camp, losing his job as a produce buyer in the process.

"People will never learn," he said. "They say we don't need the money (for redress). But it's not the money that we are after. We just want to see that it never happens again."

Kara Kondo, who was also in the Heart Mountain camp, said she feared a similar form of incarceration could happen again unless the redress question is answered.

"Don't think it can't happen again, it can," she said. "But if the people really speak, the government must answer."

Kondo added that she was hopeful that the redress issue would help shed some light on the overall problems with society.

"I hope to think that in every wrongdoing, we have the capacity to correct it, and in that way democracy works," she said. "We can be a quite strong and just people if we understand the principles of democracy."

Her comments also parallel statements made in the JACL's booklet.

"Redress for the injustices of 1942-1946 is not just an isolated Japanese-American issue but one which concerns all Americans," the JACL booklet states. "The issue is not to recover that which cannot be recovered but to acknowledge a grievous mistake of the past by providing meaningful restitution."

"Redress is a moral and human rights issue based on the constitutional guarantees of all Americans. It is one in which a query into, and an understanding of, the events that shaped a fateful policy in 1942 can help to protect the principles of democracy in the future."

Unlike other areas of the country with significant Japanese-American populations, the case for redress is not an "overriding issue" with the Yakima area Japanese, Kondo said.

"Here, we have a very informal network and are not well organized," she said. "Most think it (the bill for monetary compensation) won't happen. But then most would probably take it if it was passed."

Yoshio Hata, who was in Heart Mountain and later worked in Eastern Oregon farm labor camps, said he differs greatly with views that monetary redress is necessary.

"I don't agree with setting a monetary amount for redress, although I think that what the JACL is doing is good," Hata explained.

Ken Inaba, on the other hand, said any money that is provided will not be enough compensation.

"It's nothing compared to what we should be entitled to," he said. "When

you look at the loss we had, the money doesn't even compare. What makes me sad was how much my dad suffered. He really went through a lot of hell. And as far as I'm concerned, there is no way that you can ever replace that."

Other local views on the redress issue range from using any money received from the government for funding cultural community centers, to refusing the compensation outright, to requesting the government set aside a special day each year to remember the struggle of living through the concentration camp era.

But most of the people who lived through the period are unified in their accusation that American history has all but forgotten how the Japanese community was treated as a result of the war.

"It's unfortunate that it has taken this long to get attention," Kondo said. "People should be big enough to face up to what happened. If not, then we'll never learn."

She said that she has looked through some 25 history books in the past few years, and only three mention anything about the Japanese evacuation or the concentration camps.

"And of those that did have something, they only had a paragraph or two," Kondo said.

Inaba said he would also like to see history books record the event with more detail "so that people can learn."

"Some people say it could never happen again," he said. "But that point is arguable. When the hostages were seized in Iran, many people acted about the same way as they did back when Pearl Harbor was bombed. You can't really say that all the people have learned."

"Looking at it now, it seems the hostility goes with certain events. We like to think that we are more compassionate and humane, but there is always a certain segment where the hostility is still there."