

Centenarians receive redress checks

by Robert Shimabukuro

A standing-room-only crowd packed the Nisei Veterans Hall Sunday, October 14, to witness the historic presentation of a letter of apology and \$20,000 to the five oldest Seattle Japanese Americans entitled to redress compensation.

The redress, authorized by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (CLA), came almost 50 years after the 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were removed from the West Coast and placed in internment camps during WWII. U.S. Justice Department Deputy Assistant Attorney General James Turner presented the redress checks to Frank Yatsu, who on October 13 turned 107; Shoichiro Katsuno, 105; Uta Wakamatsu, 102; Kichisaburo Ishimitsu, 103; and Harry Nakagawa, 100.

Last year, Congress, after a tough legislative battle, converted redress compensation into a \$500 million-a-year entitlement program, authorizing the first payments this month. But the government shutdown earlier this month had many in the Japanese American community a little anxious. The ceremony Sunday eased the doubts and anxiety — indeed, the long journey was beginning its final phase.

Payments are being made to the oldest survivors first. Administrator for the Office of Redress Administration Robert Bratt said that checks had been mailed to those eligible born in and before 1917.

By the end of the year, he said, additional checks and letters of apology would be sent to those born between 1917 and June 1920. In all, 25,000 redress compensation packages will be sent for the fiscal year 1990-'91.

Redress activist, Sam Shoji, who as a social worker at Keiro Nursing Home has been instrumental in insuring that residents at the nursing home had all the necessary documents and forms filled out correctly, spoke eloquently on the redress movement since the '70s.

The redress movement then provided a "ray of sunshine like the dawn of a new day," he said. The organization and volunteer efforts of supporters furthered that ray into the noontime sun with the passage of the CLA, he continued, while today we have been absorbing the "afternoon sunshine of that day." Shoji called the presentation to the centenarians "a dream come true," and a "symbol to all those living and dead who deserve the recognition."

Turner and former Congressman

Continued on page two

Redress

Continued from previous page

Mike Lowry thanked the Japanese American community for acting to make the American system what it should be.

Japanese American Citizens League Pacific Northwest District Governor Bob Sato reminded everyone that redress has not dimmed the issues at all. He urged people to continue the struggle for accuracy in history books and to be more aware of the rights and needs of other groups. "We need to be very involved in the lessons of the past," he said.

Cherry Kinoshita and Sam Shoji were singled out for their commitment and work for redress by Bratt, who called them the "superstars of redress."

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While every person attending the redress ceremony was happy and grateful that a long struggle was reaching its goal, many regretted that it had taken so long. Others expressed disappointment that President Bush did not attend any of the ceremonies and others questioned the letter of apology. A sampling of opinion follows:

Chuck Kato: "It's about time. It's been

a long time coming. It's great to see the issei get their check. Too many have passed away. It's too bad it came so late. But as I said, 'I won't believe it till I see it' and now I see it!"

Chizu Omori: "It's pretty late in the day. It's a disappointment that President Bush did not make a public appearance on this occasion or any of the others. Because he did not give it personally, it detracted from the impact of the message."

Omori also thought the ceremony should have acknowledged the early pioneers like Henry Miyatake, Mike Nakata and Shosuke Sasaki.

Shosuke Sasaki, when asked how he felt about the ceremony: "It would have been nice for Henry (Miyatake) and Mike (Nakata) to have gotten some credit. It was his (Miyatake's) refusal to give up, his determination that kept it going. They (Miyatake and Nakata) thought of the idea to fund redress in '73-'74 — the tax check-off plan."

Henry Miyatake, when asked how he felt about not being mentioned: Cherry (Kinoshita) and this group have done a good job. It's just unfortunate that we did not have it (redress) long ago."

Bob Sato, when asked how he felt about the letter of apology, which some have criticized as not an apology at all: "This community has won an apology. The check is a symbol of that apology. We shouldn't get hung up on a few words."

Frank Abe, one of the organizers in the original 1978 Day of Remembrance in Seattle: "The flame was lit by Ed Uno in San Francisco, but was fanned here in Seattle. Without the Day of Remembrance, people would still feel the fear of a White backlash."

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