



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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PRESS RELEASE

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JACL Supports Honorary Degrees in California

San Francisco, CA.- California State Assembly member Warren T. Furutani has introduced a bill which would complete the unfinished business of conferring honorary degrees to Japanese Americans whose college education was disrupted due to their incarceration in concentration camps during World War II. Assembly Bill 37 was heard in the Assembly Higher Education Committee at the California State Capitol this week and passed unanimously out of committee.

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the oldest and largest Asian American civil and human rights organization in the nation, supports Assembly Bill 37 which would restore a measure of dignity and honor to a group of United States citizens who suffered greatly. The JACL feels these former students who are now mostly in their mid to late eighties deserve this recognition.

The JACL and other Asian American groups commemorated the twentieth anniversary in 2008 of the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which provided that an official Presidential apology and reparations be given to Japanese Americans who were unconstitutionally removed from their west coast homes during World War II and placed in concentration camps in desolate areas of the United States. The nation recognized that Japanese Americans were unjustly discriminated against solely because of their ethnic origin.

Larry Oda, National JACL President, stated, "JACL applauds Assembly Bill 37 and Assembly member Furutani's effort to recognize the injustice endured by these former students. It is unfortunate that anyone be prevented from completing their college education and receiving their degrees because of racism, war hysteria and ineffective political leadership; and this acknowledgement is overdue."

The University of Washington held a ceremony last year to honor Japanese American former students who were forced to leave the school in 1942. Jonathan Kaji, a former National JACL Board Member who was instrumental in having a similar program held at the University of Southern California (USC), was on hand to testify at the hearing.

National Executive Director of the JACL, Floyd Mori, who also testified at the hearing said, "The passage of Assembly Bill 37 would not only right a wrong, but it reminds us that we should never again let war hysteria and racism override the basic civil liberties and due process promised to each one of us, regardless of the color of our skin."

Others who testified were: Kiyo Sato, author and former Sacramento City College Student in 1942; Judy Sakaki, Vice President of Student Affairs, UCOP; Frederick Gaines, Chair, Department of Ethnic Studies, College of San Mateo; Carole Hayashino, Former Associate Vice President for Advancement at San Francisco State University; Walter Kawamoto, Florin JACL Chapter President; Paul Osaki, Executive Director of the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California and his associates, Ali Kagawa, Jeff Chu, and Courtney Okuhara.

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The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the oldest and largest Asian American civil and human rights organization in the nation. For more information on the JACL or to join the organization, please visit the website at www.jacl.org.