

Japanese American Citizens League,
Houston Chapter
4905 Linden Drive
Bellaire, TX 77401
hirasaki@attglobal.net
February 9, 2003

The Honorable Chris Bell
216 Cannon
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Bell,

We are shocked to hear the statements made by your colleague, Rep. Coble, R-N.C. He agrees with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who established the internment camps during World War II.

“We were at war. They (Japanese-Americans) were an endangered species.” Coble said, “For many of these Japanese – Americans, it was not safe for them to be on the street.”

Like most Arab-Americans today, Coble said, most Japanese-Americans during World War II were not America’s enemies.

“Some probably were intent on doing harm to us,” he said, “just as some of these Arab-Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us.”

You are probably aware of the report from the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to Congress in 1982. Its conclusions read:

“The promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it – detention, ending detention, and ending exclusion – were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes, which shaped these decisions, were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership. ... A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who, without individual review or any probative evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.”

Rep Coble’s remark about internment for the protection of Japanese-Americans is absurd. How could a congressman be so ignorant about the facts? If the Japanese Americans were so endangered, why were so many released from the camps to serve in the military or seek employment in Chicago, Cleveland and New Jersey? Is he aware of the Japanese-American, 442nd Infantry Regiment Combat Team (442nd RCT) often referred to as “Go For Broke,” that lost so many lives rescuing the “Lost” Battalion from Texas?

The real situation is described by a quote from Secretary Norman Mineta: “More than 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced from their homes,”

recalled Mr. Mineta. “My family and I were among them. “We were kept behind barbed wire for no reason other than our race. No charges were filed, no trials were held, and no one spoke out on our behalf. We were told it was for our own protection.”

Even at the young age of 11, this seemed incongruous to him. “If it was for our own protection, then why were the machine guns pointed at us?”

We should not have someone who agrees with an unconstitutional and racist policy of the 1940s in a position of leadership as chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security. He should step down from his position and apologize to the Japanese-American community.

The Houston Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League has many of its members as your constituents. We therefore ask you to seek an apology from Coble. We must reject the view that any American citizen or legal resident should be imprisoned and restricted based solely on ethnicity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G.J. Hirasaki".

Executive Committee of the Houston Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League

George J. Hirasaki, PhD, (Republican)

A.J. Hartsook Professor in Chemical Engineering, Rice University

Daniel Watanabe, PhD

Sut Oishi (Republican)

Mari Okayabashi

Howard Lindsay

Lily Yamasaki