

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: JACL Recognizes Grant Ujifusa

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Dear Editor,

At the recent JACL National Convention in San Jose, Grant Ujifusa was named a JACLER of the Biennium. I think his introduction and the acceptance speech might interest readers of *The Rafu*. Both are included below.

George  
Wakiji, Camarillo

## **Introduction by David Lin, JACL National President:**

Grant Ujifusa became the legislative strategy chair of the Legislative Education Committee, the redress lobbying arm of JACL, in 1982 when redress was stalled in both houses of Congress. He left in 1992 after convincing the first Bush Administration to agree to Dan Inouye's proposal to make redress payments an entitlement.

Grant is the founding editor of "The Almanac of American Politics," which the late Tim Russert called the "bible" of American politics. This gave Grant access and clout almost anywhere he wanted in the Washington of the 1980s.



Grant Ujifusa (Asia Society Photo)

For devising a justification for redress that appealed to both liberals and conservatives of the 1980s, for having a significant impact on HR 442 as it made its way through Congress, and in particular for reversing President Ronald Reagan's opposition to HR 442, Grant received the Order of the Rising Sun from the Japanese government. For the Japanese, this is the equivalent of a knighthood.

**Acceptance speech read by Mas Hashimoto:**

I apologize for not being with you today. A long-standing family obligation has kept me away. But I am so happy that the convention has chosen to celebrate Grayce Uyehara, among the most consequential Japanese Americans in our history.

Grayce was the moral and political epicenter of Japanese American redress. Where ever she was – Washington, Los Angeles or Boise – that's where redress was. Her leadership was brightly charismatic, but featured plain talk. Thanks to Grayce, all the redress trains ran on time. She made sure that everyone – including Nikkei members of Congress – did what they were supposed to do when they were supposed to do it.

There absolutely would have been no Japanese American redress without Grayce Uyehara and the trust our community had in her.

I would like to accept the Biennium Award in memory of three people: Sparky Matsunaga, Cherry Kinoshita, and Mike Masaoka.

We need to remember that Sen. Matsunaga, virtually by himself, was responsible for Senate passage of S.1009. After three intense years of lobbying his colleagues, Sparky produced 69 votes on the Senate floor for our bill. An astonishing bipartisan,

filibuster-proof majority.

Sparky embodied the spirit of aloha, one reason his colleagues loved and respected him. So if Sparky really wanted something, his fellow senators were going to make happen for him. And Sparky really wanted Japanese American redress.

For me, Cherry Kinoshita was the most intellectually gifted Japanese American who worked on redress – she was raw IQ and total gaman, able to get 10 of 10 of the Washington congressional delegation to vote “yes” on redress. The results out of California were nowhere close to that.

From her home in Seattle, Cherry also spotted an obscure provision in the Senate bill that denied payment to the estate of any eligible who died before her payment turn came up. Uncorrected, this would have meant that some Nikkei, mostly from among our elderly, would lose an arm-wrestling contest with Death itself, devastating both individual families and our community. Sparky got the provision fixed.

Finally, let me speak kindly of the much-maligned founding father of JACL as we know it, Mike Masaoka, a man responsible for Issei citizenship and the War Brides Act.

To get HR 442 out of Barney Frank’s subcommittee, Mike figured out a way to get a conservative, born-again Christian from Georgia to support redress. Mike was probably the only person on the planet who had any idea how that could be done. After 40 years in Washington. Mike really knew how the town worked.

For me, Mike’s critics stand on his shoulders and box him about the ears. For sure without him, there would have been no redress.

And so, let us continue to revere the memory of all those – not just these four from our Greatest Generation – who helped to make redress a reality for us and for all Americans to follow us.

Grant Ujifusa