

GERALD YAMADA

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program

The Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program, authorized by Public Law 109-441, was conceived by Gerald Yamada, partner in the Washington, DC law firm of O'Connor & Hannan. He is a Sansei, born in the Jerome War Relocation Authority (WRA) Center in Arkansas on May 5, 1944, and has served in leadership positions for several Japanese American organizations that included having had a critical role in building the National Japanese American Memorial in Washington, DC.

In 2004, Mr. Yamada conceived the idea to create a federal grant program to preserve the confinement sites that were used to imprison 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II. The purpose of the legislation was to preserve the confinement sites as teaching venues to inform the American public about how persons of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned during World War II and how the Japanese Americans, even as they were subject to an unprecedented level of racial bigotry, proved their loyalty to their homeland.

Based on his extensive experience working with Congress, Mr. Yamada developed the strategy to be used to secure passage of the legislation. As a first step, he used the National Japanese American Political Action Committee (JaAmPAC) that he created in 2003 that allowed him to channel the legislative effort through his law firm. His own time was donated, while JaAmPAC paid for the out-of-pocket expenses. He was then asked organizations to join, at no cost, the Japanese American National Heritage Coalition (JANHC), which came to number thirty-three national and local organizations. As a political action committee, JaAmPAC could not contact Members of Congress on pending legislation, which is why Yamada formed JANHC as an umbrella organization to collect and disseminate information to Members of Congress.

The initial phase of Mr. Yamada's strategy was to develop bipartisan support before the legislation was introduced. Because the Republicans controlled both the Senate and House, Yamada's first step was to convince Congressman Bill Thomas, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee – arguably the most powerful committee in Congress -- to become the Republican lead sponsor. Congressman Robert Matsui agreed to become the lead Democratic co-sponsor, but unfortunately died before the legislation was introduced by Congressman Thomas. Congresswoman Doris Matsui, wife of Robert Matsui, then became the Democratic co-

sponsor and worked with Congressman Mike Honda. In the Senate, Daniel Inouye introduced the bill, with Senator Robert Bennett of Utah becoming the first Republican to sign on as a co-sponsor. Senator Daniel Akaka, also a co-sponsor, was very helpful as the Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which had jurisdiction over the legislation in the Senate.

Mr. Yamada developed the structure of the program and drafted the initial legislative language for the bill. He coined the term “confinement sites” in the legislation so that, in addition to the 10 War Relocation Authority internment camps, other sites, such as assemble centers, Department of Justice camps, camps in Hawaii, Crystal City among others would be eligible to apply for funding.

Because any authorizing legislation creating a new program is required to have a five-year authorization limit, Mr. Yamada feared that, even if Congress passed the law to authorize the Confinement Sites Program, the law would expire if no appropriations act were passed within five years to fund the program. To prevent the possibility, he crafted a novel provision to ensure that the program would be fully funded before the legislation could be terminated.

To build support for the legislation, Mr. Yamada sent over 200 letters to House members and helped to convince 114 House members to co-sponsor the bill. Meanwhile, JaAmPAC contributed to the campaign committees of Members of Congress who were co-sponsors of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (also known as Redress). JaAmPAC also donated to the campaign committees of Members of Congress who co-sponsored the legislation. After passage, JaAmPAC donated to key House members of the Appropriations Committee whose support was needed to fund the program.

Mr. Yamada was invited to participate in negotiations between Congressman Thomas’ office and the National Park Service (NPS), consulted with Senator Akaka’s office on amendments to the House passed bill, and worked with the Congressional Budget Office on the budget outlays for the program. He was invited to testify in support of the legislation in the House and Senate hearings and was the sole Japanese American representative to testify in the Senate hearings. At those hearings, NPS testified in opposition to the legislation.

Even so, the bill was passed by the House in 2005, by the Senate in 2006, and signed into law by President Bush in December 2006 authorizing a \$50 million program. Altogether three years of effort was required to create the Confinement Sites Grant Program.

After the legislation was passed, the next step was to obtain funding for the program in the Department of Interior’s annual appropriations act. Mr. Yamada met with Department of Interior and National Park Service (NPS) officials to determine whether the Bush Administration would ask for funding for the newly created program. He was informed that NPS would not ask for appropriations to fund to the program. Based on these discussions, Yamada was concerned, even if the program were funded, about the types of projects NPS would support. Working with the House Appropriations Committee, he secured language in the House appropriations act report that directed NPS to hold hearings and provide a report to the Committee describing the standards that it would use to fund projects. He attended several of the hearings and wrote a comment letter advocating the standards that should be adopted.

With help from Congresswoman Doris Matsui, Mr. Yamada worked another three years to line up the necessary support in both Appropriations Committees to create the funding for the program. In its first year, the program was funded at \$1 million, and has been funded at \$3 million each year thereafter.

Once funds were appropriated for the program, NPS became fully supportive of the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant Program and adopted the funding standards described in its report. NPS now consults regularly with Mr. Yamada on the direction of the program.

The Confinement Sites Grant Program is in its 8th year of funding starting in fiscal year 2009. The broad range of funded projects demonstrates that Mr. Yamada’s goals for the legislation are being fulfilled. His goals in creating the program were (1) to interest a new generation of persons in developing projects about the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans and (2) to provide the resources for physical venues that would educate the American public about how the government treated Japanese Americans during World War II. The number of “grass roots” projects that have received funding so far is impressive, and the funded projects, when taken together, are telling a compelling and comprehensive story about what was endured by Japanese Americans during World War II and how prejudice was overcome.

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A critical contribution to the construction of the *National Japanese American Memorial* in Washington, DC.



Grant Ujifusa's Keynote Speech at JAVA's Quarterly Lunch

Grant Ujifusa was the keynote speaker at the JAVA Quarterly Lunch on October 12, 2013. Mr. Ujifusa was knighted by the Japanese Government for reversing Ronald Reagan's opposition to HR 442. He was also made an honorary member of K Company, 442 RCT.

I am very happy to be here with you today to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the enactment of HR 442. Thank you for inviting me.

I am especially happy to be here with my friend of many years, Gerald Yamada, with whom I served on the Japanese American National Memorial Board in the late 1990s. Without him, I don't think the Memorial would have been built.

The largely unknown story is this. A group of five on the Board composed of thirty members absolutely hated the idea of Mike Masaoka's name going on the Memorial wall. And the five assumed that because

Japanese Americans operated by consensus put together privately, they would get their way. If they

didn't, they would simply block the project. If consensus was needed, the five had a veto.

But Gerald came up with a really simple way to break the deadlock: Take a vote, a roll call vote — yes or no on Mike from everybody in front of everybody. This was done on no fewer than four separate occasions at three separate board meetings, with all margins around 25 to 4. Four roll call votes were taken to make sure that word would get out to the community and to the National Park Service that no Japanese American norms were being violated.

And so we were able to move ahead with construction, and that I feel we owe to Gerald....

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