

Posted On May 15, 2012 [Columnists, English](#)

Dear Editor,

I recently read in *The Rafu* ([“Joy, Reflection at 43rd Manzanar Pilgrimage,” May 1, 2012](#)) that Professor Mitchell Maki said to participants at the recent DOR event that Rose Ochi was responsible for getting the story of Kaz Masuda to Ronald Reagan. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was instead June Masuda Goto, Kaz’s younger sister, who convinced the President to change his mind about redress.

On Aug. 10, 1988, the day of the signing ceremony, Ms. Ochi, with Norm Mineta’s help, managed to slip to one of the handlers of the event a copy of the story from an ancient copy of *The Pacific Citizen* about Reagan’s appearance at Kaz’s memorial service in 1945. Reagan then quoted his own words from the story.

But the President decided to sign our bill long before he put pen to paper at a ceremonial occasion. Real work in the world, of course, does not get done at an event orchestrated for the public and the press, but long before.

How can Professor Maki determine for himself that Ms. Ochi had nothing to do with Reagan’s decision? As a scholar, he often finds himself, I am sure, looking at original documents housed in archives in order to pin down authenticity. So I suggest that he take a trip to the Reagan Library in Simi Valley and look for anything Ms. Ochi may have sent to Reagan before Aug. 10, 1988. He will find nothing.

But thanks to Gov. Tom Kean of New Jersey, Professor Maki will find three letters about redress sent to the President in November of 1987 and read by Reagan personally.

One of them was written by June Masuda Goto. Professor Maki will be looking at the letter that convinced Reagan to sign the redress bill. So much can be confirmed by speaking to Tom Kean, with whom Reagan talked by phone after reading June’s letter that came to him, by a line of access reserved for Republican governors.

Any liberal Democrat like Ms. Ochi had no access; the reverse is true today for Obama and conservative Republicans. Why give political opponents anything, people who would never vote for us? Which is why the redress messenger had to be a Republican, Tom Kean. The governor also later served our country as co-chair of the 9/11 Commission.

What June wrote carried great emotional power because it was a direct plea from someone who knew Kaz as a member of the Masuda family. And Army Captain Ronald Reagan remembered speaking about her brother at the emotional Fountain Valley ceremony for his family in December 1945. “I remember being there,” the President said to Gov. Kean.

Reagan had earlier opposed redress because former Sen. S.I. Hayakawa had convinced his good friend Attorney General Edwin Meese, the President’s most trusted aide, that Japanese Americans were confined for reasons of “protective custody.” Both Reagan and Meese liked Hayakawa because he was a very conservative Californian and told jokes with impeccable timing, but June’s letter and the President’s memory of Kaz prevailed.

After the signing, it was June, not Ms. Ochi, who was introduced to the President. And the following day on the front page of *The New York Times*, above the fold, there is a big photo of June Masuda Goto, not Ms. Ochi, with Reagan.

White House logs of the Reagan years, also at the library, will show no visits to lobby redress by Ms. Ochi. But the logs will show three visits by the strategy chair of JACL/LEC (Legislative Education Committee) in 1987 and one in 1988 to the West Wing to see Chief of Staff Ken Duberstein and his aide Will Ball.

At the meeting on Feb. 14, 1988 – six months before the signing ceremony – Duberstein told me that the President had changed his mind and was going to sign the bill. Until that morning meeting with Duberstein, no one outside Reagan’s inner circle knew what was going to happen on Aug. 10, 1988.

The day after meeting with Duberstein, I called the great and gentle Sen. Spark Matsunaga and said that he could begin to move the bill in Sen. John Glenn’s Government Operations Committee and then onto the floor of the Senate. Both happened quickly in the spring of 1988 when we knew for sure that the President was on board. Of these events in the Senate, as the documentary records of Matsunaga will show, Ms. Ochi knew nothing.

The three letters that Reagan read were reprinted in *The Pacific Citizen’s* 1989 holiday edition; later so too were my remarks given at the hugely successful 1998 UCLA redress conference organized by the careful scholar Harry Kitano and

Professor Maki. Also available in published form from the museum is Professor Maki's day-long interview with me in 1997.

Finally, there is the authoritative Kennedy School case study of redress first read and discussed by students in 1989, on the inside cover of which is reprinted the only personal letter Reagan sent to anyone about redress.

Sincerely,
Grant Ujifusa
Chappaqua, New York

Tags