

REMARKS FOR  
THE HON. NORMAN Y. MINETA

COMMEMORATION CEREMONY

JAPANESE AMERICAN NATIONAL MEMORIAL

WASHINGTON, DC

NOVEMBER 3, 2011

10:00AM

Thank you.

And thank you, to all of our honored guests here today – on so many levels, I do not believe I can find the word to describe them all.

A bit less than 70 years ago, the military forces of the Empire of Japan attacked our naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, our army facilities at Schofield Barracks and our Army Air Corps Base at Hickam Field. And as Americans of Japanese ancestry, many of us found ourselves trapped in the middle. It was an injustice, because it was not where we belonged – or wanted to be.

The men and women honored by the Congressional Gold Medal, and those we honor here today refused to be relegated to the middle. Others were confused about which country was theirs. But these folks had no doubts. In the face of discrimination, bigotry, hatred, and fear, they refused to be shaken from their dedication to serving this nation. Our community's entire future was shaped by the results of their courage and sacrifice.

When the attack on Pearl Harbor took place, I was 10 years old. I didn't understand the full scope of what was going on. The evacuation and internment, which are commemorated here, at this Memorial, were two of the darkest chapters in the history of this Nation.

The immutable, unalterable Americans who we honor today – those who could not be shaken neither in their faith in, nor their dedication to, the promise of America – provided the foundation for our eventual national reconciliation. That has manifested itself in many ways:

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which finally apologized for the evacuation and internment – and which forever, altered our national understanding of the meaning of the Constitution itself.

The review, authored by Senator Daniel Akaka of Hawaii, that secured the belated award of the medals those we honor so deeply deserve, but did not receive. And the awards of the Congressional Gold Medal we have been celebrating. And, the very construction of this Memorial itself.

One little known fact about this Memorial is that the land on which we are standing was once part of the Capitol Grounds. In order for this Memorial to be built here, in addition to the Congressional authorization for its construction, we had to pass legislation to transfer the ownership of this land from the Congress to the National Park Service an agency of the United States Department of the Interior.

This Memorial, in a very real sense, represents a cooperative effort between both the Legislative Branch and the Executive Branches of the United States Government. The Capitol Grounds were not diminished in size because, in exchange for this site, the Capitol Grounds were enhanced by the addition of a plot of property just a few blocks east of here on Maryland Avenue. That property lies adjacent to the United States Supreme Court.

But just as we altered the shape of the Capitol Grounds, and the National Mall, and the grounds of the Supreme Court to accommodate this Memorial, those who served with the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service altered the shape of the soul of our Great Nation, because they refused to give up on it.

Success is often determined by the heroes and teachers who lift you up on their shoulders to reach higher. Our success in securing the passage of redress was notable – but that was not the moment of victory.

For me, the moment of victory came when my Congressional office received a phone call a couple of years later from a teenager, a high school student from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. She wanted to talk to me about the evacuation and internment because she wanted to make it the focus for her National History Day Project. And she wasn't Japanese American. Or even Asian Pacific American. But

she knew all the right questions to ask. And her project won the Oklahoma National History Day competition that year. A few years later, when I was serving as Secretary of Transportation, my scheduling staff got a similar request. My scheduler said, "I think I can find ten minutes for her." And a long-time staffer of mine said, "For this? Block an hour and a half, because I can promise you that is not going to turn out to be a ten minute call."

The patriots we honor here today built bridges that we needed to heal this country. And, through their courage, they redeemed the soul of this Nation we all love so much.

May God bless each and every one of you, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

Thank you.