

NAKANO ENDS A MEMORABLE CAREER IN THE CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLY

A look back at some of the many accomplishments from 1998-2004

Emerging from a humble background and spending his early childhood at Santa Anita Assembly Center, Jerome, Arkansas and Tulelake Internment Camps during World War II, never in his wildest dreams did Assemblyman George Nakano (D-Torrance) imagine that he would serve as a member of the California State Assembly. Quickly emerging as a leader, Nakano became the first Asian American appointed to serve as the Chair of the Assembly Democratic Caucus.

Nakano has just served out his third and final term as the Member from the 53rd Assembly District, being forced out of office by term limits, but he plans to run for the state Senate in 2006. "There is still much more to do," says Nakano. "I still have many ideas that will further help California and the Japanese American community."

Through Nakano's effort, the first ever Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus was created in 2001. As the inaugural Chair of the API Caucus, the Assemblyman's leadership set the agenda and helped the Caucus grow into an authoritative body in the state legislature. It was through this position that he authored and shepherded his landmark bill (AB116) to create the Commission on API American Affairs. Nakano's leadership in both of these political bodies has been the driving force behind the efforts to better identify and attend to the needs and problems affecting the Japanese American community.

His ability to lead and strategize made him a key player during the controversial events surrounding Representative Howard Coble (R-N.C) and the JA Community in 2003. As chair of the subcommittee on Homeland Security, Rep. Coble commented about Japanese Americans being interned for their safety and protection. Having experienced internment, Nakano knew these comments to be false and derogatory, and took the initiative to craft a bipartisan supported resolution condemning Coble's remarks and asking for his resignation as Chair. Knowing a partisan resolution would be less effective, Nakano insisted on including language that both parties could support. The resolution was ultimately approved by the California Legislature and sent to Coble.

Nakano also demonstrated his leadership through legislation and the ability to acquire substantial state funding for the JA community. As part of the Assemblyman's advocacy in 2000, he authored the California Civil Liberties Public Education Act, which extended a grant program that teaches the experience of JAs before, during and immediately after WWII. The program, which annually appropriates \$1 million to support educational programs, is administered by the California State Library that was created in 1999. The overwhelming response to this program inspired Nakano to extend this program two years beyond its original sunset in 2001. "From the beginning, it has been my goal to reach out to the JA community and in turn, ensure California government understands and addresses any identified needs," said the Assemblyman. "JAs are increasingly active and I encourage everyone to continue their advocacy." Many projects have benefited from the extension of this program. The JACL- South Bay Chapter received a grant to present the rich oral histories of JAs from the Southern Calif South Bay region. The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance - Los Angeles Chapter (APALA) will now have the necessary funds for their project that will provide educational materials and field trips to the JA National Museum and Manzanar National Historical Site. The Calif Japanese American Leadership

Council received a grant to create three permanent outdoor landmark exhibits to be placed in the Japantowns of San Francisco, San Jose and Los Angeles. A grant to the JA Historical Society of Southern Calif enabled the publication of their book, Nanka Nikkei Voices, Resettlement years 1945-1955. Also funded was the making of the motion picture, "Only the Brave" - based on the 100th/442nd Regiment's rescue of the "Lost Battalion" Texans during World War II.

Throughout his six years in office, Nakano was able to secure funding for numerous key JA community projects throughout Calif. In 1999, the Assemblyman placed \$1 million in the state budget to fund the completion of the National Resources Center Media Arts Center and the Orientation Theater in the JA National Museum.

Nakano was able to secure another one million dollars in the 2001-2002 budget. This time it was for the Go-for-Broke Educational Foundation, where the money is now being used to expand their education program in Calif schools and to educate teachers and students on the JA WWII experience including the internment experiences. During the prior budget year, the Assemblyman was able to secure \$500,000 for the 100/442/MIS WWII Memorial Foundation. The money went toward educating children in grades K-12 about the role of the JA military unit (the highest decorated unit for its size and length of service) in the U.S. military during WWII.

"Too many children growing up today do not know about the JA experience during WWII," said Nakano. "These funds have allowed for programs to emerge that teach students about the storied JA military unit and internment." Nakano also secured \$150,000 for the restoration of Manzanar National Park, a former internment camp and now a State Historic Landmark.

"One of the more memorable moments of my career was when the Calif Legislature officially recognized the JA WWII veterans for the first time in the State's history," said the Assemblyman. Nakano led the efforts in the Legislature to see this event come to fruition. The event took place during the year of the 60th Anniversary of the internment of JAs. Every year, Nakano led the Legislature in a *Day of Remembrance* to commemorate the events surrounding the internment.

Along with funding various projects, Nakano has also spearheaded honorable dedications for WWII veterans. Believing that too many JA have not received their just recognition for their role during WWII, Nakano found ways to publicize their efforts. The 405/105 Freeway interchange was known only as the "Sadao Munemori Memorial Interchange." Unfortunately, very few people knew who Munemori was, let alone know why an interchange was named after him. The Assemblyman took it upon himself to secure funding to rename the interchange to read "Medal of Honor WWII" under Munemori's name. In another effort to educate the public about another JA WWII veteran, Nakano submitted a formal request to Major General Paul D. Monroe, the Adjutant General of the Calif National Guard to rename the Calif Army National Guard Armory in Torrance in honor of Medal of Honor recipient Ted Tanouye. The request was approved and a grand ceremony followed.

Throughout his Assembly career, Nakano has been a leader and visionary for the JA community and his advocacy has been instrumental to so many programs. His accessibility has made him easily approachable and his willingness to listen has drawn people towards him. "I always welcome ideas and I encourage people to continue their involvement within the community." said Nakano. We will certainly welcome the Assemblyman back and we know he will always be there when we need him.