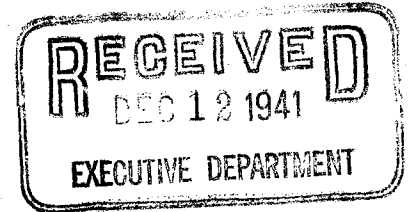


5015 N. E. Cleveland Avenue,
Portland, Oregon
December 11, 1941

Governor Charles A. Sprague,
State House,
Salem, Oregon



Dear Governor Sprague:

I am writing to you on a matter of very grave importance to the welfare and safety of our state and nation, and to place my services at your disposal wherever and whenever you may consider them of value.

This matter is one concerning American citizens of Japanese ancestry in our state, and, through them, their parents, who are at present enemy aliens, or nationals of an enemy country.

First of all, I am writing on the assumption that it is not the purpose of our state and national government to persecute or take punitive action against any person or group merely because of race, color, or religion. Any action taken by our state or national government will, I know, be taken for the purpose of protecting American lives and property and of waging the present war to a successful and, if possible, a speedy conclusion. In order to accomplish this purpose, it will be necessary for our state and nation to enlist the services and resources of every loyal person, whatever his color or creed.

At this point I want to make my own position clear. I am a graduate of Willamette University, a one-time newspaper reporter, and at present a teacher in Jefferson High School here in Portland. Before coming to Portland, I served as superintendent of the school at Westport, where I had a number of Japanese children in my school, and where, through the children, I became acquainted with their parents. After our arrival in Portland, Mrs. Oliver was invited to serve as adviser to a youth group at the local Japanese Methodist church, which position she accepted and still holds. Through that connection we have continually been in touch with these youth and their parents in the church mentioned. Our home has been open to them at all times, and Mrs. Oliver's counsel has been, I believe sincerely, of profound influence in shaping their homes and lives along lines of Christian ideals and belief in the principles of American democracy.

At one time we took into our home temporarily three little Japanese children whose parents had died, until the Japanese community was able to provide for them. At another time we provided a home for a Japanese dental student while he completed his course. At present we have living with us a high school student, son of one of the Japanese families whom we knew at Westport who was taken back to Japan some years ago by his father and returned here over a year ago in order that he might not lose his precious heritage of American citizenship.

Mrs. Oliver and I believe that in this way we have been able to serve "one of the least of these, our brethren," and at the same time to be of service to our country in teaching these young people loyalty and American ideals of family life.

I believe that those who have had opportunity to know them will agree with me when I say that the American citizens of Japanese ancestry have established a high reputation in the past as useful and loyal citizens. Many of them have volunteered or have gone willingly upon draft call into the armed forces of our nation to give their lives, if need be, for the country of their birth. The organization which

represents them -- the Japanese-American Citizen's League -- has frequently demonstrated its loyalty and single-minded desire to serve our country.

This serious question arises, then: Will it be possible for these American citizens of Japanese ancestry, when properly identified as such, to continue their education, their employment, and their right to protection of person and property, subject to the same restrictions which are upon all of us in this time of emergency?

Again, their parents, deprived by law from ever becoming American citizens, have nevertheless reared their children to prize American citizenship and to be loyal, useful citizens of ~~America~~ even as children. The low rate of juvenile and adult delinquency among them attests to this teaching. At the same time, these parents have remembered the days of their own youth in their native land and have retained contacts through friends and relatives there, sometimes sending their children to study in Japan that they might retain some knowledge of the Japanese cultural background. Now the world of these elder Japanese has been upset, their assets have been frozen, their businesses closed, their actions questioned, and, in a few cases, their persons arrested and detained, possibly for the duration of the war.

This raises another serious question: How are their families to be maintained when their businesses are closed and when employment is denied to them and, in many cases, to their children who are American citizens? To let them starve is of course unthinkable. Will they become a problem for state relief agencies? Will the national government make some provision for them? If so, will the claims of these families be given fair and prompt consideration, with^{out} prejudice? One can become very hungry in a very few days while the red tape is unrolling.

I have raised these two questions, and now I would like to propose for your most serious consideration a possible solution to them.

I propose that you appoint at once an emergency committee of prominent citizens -- perhaps a committee in each county or community where Japanese live would be necessary -- a committee made up of persons of such reputation that there could not be possibly any question about their loyalty, which committee would be authorized and asked to serve in a guardianship capacity for the people of Japanese blood residing in our state. Its duty would be to work, if possible in cooperation with the Japanese-American Citizen's League, in helping to solve the problems of American Citizens of Japanese ancestry in such matters as education, employment, and protection of person and property during the present emergency, in supervising a program of relief for Japanese families affected by the emergency, and possibly also in ~~standing~~ ^{acting} as sponsor for the group of Japanese nationals who have already been or may in the future be taken into custody by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in cases where the evidence does not show acts of real disloyalty to the United States but only such interest in Japanese affairs previous to the outbreak of hostilities as might normally be expected of persons whose native land is under political and economic stress.

Perhaps such Japanese nationals could have posted for them by the Japanese-American Citizen's League, or by their American friends, sufficient security to assure their good conduct and could then be released into the custody of their own families or friends under the supervision of the emergency committee, instead of being placed in an internment camp.. Those against whom proof of real disloyalty to the United States has been found should, of course, be placed in confinement at once.

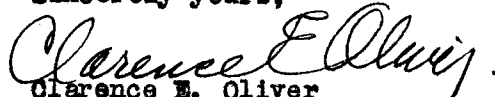
3--Governor Charles A. Sprague.

Many prominent citizens of Portland, I am sure, would be glad to serve on such a committee if you asked them to do so. E. B. McNaughton and Marshall Dana have frequently advised the Japanese-American Citizen's League, and might be interested in serving on such a committee.

I believe that such a program as I have suggested would demonstrate to the world that Oregon is serious in its effort to destroy Hitlerism, with its persecution and hatred of minority racial and national groups. I believe, also, most sincerely, that it would help to hold the loyalty of a group which can be invaluable to us in the program of winning the war against the axis powers, and to justify the faith which members of that group have had in America, which has been to them the land of freedom and democracy.

For these reasons I submit this program to you for your consideration, and, if you approve of any part or all of it, for the immediate action which the emergency requires. I shall be glad to assist in working out the program further, if you wish, or to offer my services, as a loyal citizen, to my state and nation in any place where they may be of any value.

Sincerely yours,



Clarence E. Oliver
Teacher, Jefferson High School
Portland, Oregon

W. E. Allen
January 8, 1942

Mr. Clarence E. Oliver
Jefferson High School
Portland, Oregon

My dear Mr. Oliver:

In some way your letter of December 11 was mislaid and did not come to my attention until today. I regret this very much, because you show a very fine understanding of the problems of Japanese Americans.

I have been sensitive to the difficulties which would attend Japanese who are loyal to the United States, whether citizens or not. I am not as suspicious of alien Japanese as some are, because I believe that most of them in this state are engaged in agricultural pursuits and will merely want to continue in their occupations. Not very many of them are in position to do much injury to this country, even if they were so disposed. As far as the second generation is concerned, I have had many expressions of loyalty from the Japanese-American Citizens' Leagues and I believe they are sincere.

You inquire as to the means of support for Japanese residing in this country. The early restrictions have been relaxed and Japanese aliens are now permitted to go about their usual business. They have had to turn in items such as firearms, cameras, and short wave radio sets and there is a restriction on the amount of money that they can withdraw from banks, but they are permitted to engage in their normal pursuits. There is, of course, no restriction on Japanese-American citizens unless they should be guilty of some act of disloyalty.

I realize that while these are the legal rights of enemy aliens and of Japanese-American citizens, they will nevertheless suffer because of prejudice and because of the falling off of patronage where the Japanese are operating stores or hotels. I know of no way to prevent this, although I have done my best to protect these people in their rights.

If they actually come to distress the Public Welfare agencies would give them assistance, whether citizens of this country or not. I do not believe the welfare offices would treat them with prejudice. Because of the frugality of the Japanese I doubt if many of them will be forced to depend on public agencies for support.

Mr. Clarence E. Oliver
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January 8, 1942

I note your suggestion for the appointment of an emergency committee to deal with this problem. In the interval of time which has elapsed since your letter was written I have had very little complaint on this score, except from Hood River County, where there was a feeling on the part of the civilian defense organization that the Japanese there were not cooperating as readily as they should with the requests that were made. It was suggested that they abstain from meetings and from frequent appearances on the streets as a measure of protection to themselves and to this country. I have said that it was a matter for the local leadership to work out a solution to the problem and have had no further complaint, although this matter was before me about ten days ago.

I wish you would keep me informed of what you learn or observe. The contacts which you and Mrs. Oliver have had with the Japanese should be continued. You can be of great help to them and of help to our own country as well.

I must again apologize for our failure to give your letter the prompt attention which it deserved.

Yours sincerely,

Governor

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