



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE / JACL

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June 17, 2014

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) writes to express its strong support the passage of the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (S. 1945). JACL, the oldest and largest Asian American civil and human rights organization in the United States, was founded in 1929, at a time when immigrants from Asia were barred by law from becoming naturalized citizens and gaining rights like voting eligibility. The inability of Japanese American *Issei* to elect representatives who would fight for their rights contributed to the ability of the government to unconstitutionally imprison over 110,000 Japanese Americans – non-citizens and citizens alike – in incarceration camps across the country during World War II in 1942.

While Asian Americans immigrants are now able to become naturalized citizens and participate fully in the democratic process, local attitudes and discriminatory practices sometimes still prevent their voices from being fully heard at the ballot box. Even today, voting districts still often discriminate against minorities like Asian Americans by questioning their voting eligibility based on race, ethnicity, English language capabilities, and other factors that should not determine their participation in choosing our elected officials.

Since the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, we have needed legislation that reinforces the rights of minorities across the country to vote. The bipartisan VRAA bill currently proposed includes many key elements of a modern, flexible and forward-looking Voting Rights Act, and although imperfect, we are committed to moving it forward.

Please feel free to contact our office at (202) 223-1240 or at policy@jacl.org. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all Americans are given an equal voice in making the United States as great as it can be.

Sincerely,

Priscilla Ouchida
Executive Director