

## This Year 'We Need to Heed the Call for Action for the Next Generation'

*By Priscilla Ouchida, JACL National Director*

As 2015 faded and gave way to 2016, many of the hot potato issues of the past year rolled into the new year. More than ever, the need for the Japanese American Citizens League was apparent as rhetoric surrounding Muslims, Syrian refugees, birthrights and the presidential race dominated the news in 2015. Political candidates and elected officials proliferated statements that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II was justified, and that similar policies should be applied today to refugees and Muslim Americans. The 2016 election year will require continuing education on these and many other civil rights issues.

In 2015, JACL participated in the 50th anniversary of the march across the Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. Even as the fight for voting rights was commemorated, JACL joined efforts to restore provisions that provided voting protections.

In June, I was reminded of a pre-1960s America when JACL joined a rally in Roanoke, Va., to push for the Voting Rights Advancement Act.

Two thousand and fifteen transported me to my childhood as discussions around the table centered on fair housing, immigration and fair wages. In 1957, the City Council voted to “redevelop” Japan-town in Sacramento, Calif. Many families like mine were forced to find new housing after their homes were condemned under eminent domain. My mother came home from house-hunting trips in tears because all white covenants prevented her from purchasing a house in many parts of the city.

Current-day barriers are not blatant but have the same impact. In 2016, we can expect challenges to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and labor protections.

JACL is positioned to face these issues head-on.

We will continue to develop an exhibit at the Smithsonian National Museum on American History marking the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066. The exhibit will open on Feb. 19, 2017, and will educate 5 million visitors about the Japanese American experience. The exhibit is timely — an entire generation has been raised since the “More Perfect Union” exhibit closed at the museum. JACL’s partnership with the Smithsonian will be a reminder of lessons of the past.

The civic engagement program that encourages our community to register to vote and participate in the democratic process is well-timed.

First-generation Japanese immigrants were denied the right to vote, and JACL has

fought for 87 years to gain full rights of citizenship for Japanese Americans. As many of the rights we take for granted are being tested, it is important that our community voice our views through the ballot box.

JACL continues to develop leadership that will ensure the organization's future. The JACL Kakehashi program is providing an international experience for young Japanese Americans. Through the program, many students are finding their Japanese roots and developing their identity as Japanese Americans. The program is a permanent program and provides an outstanding opportunity for college-age students to expand their perspectives about the global community.

Two thousand and fifteen ended with a commendation for JACL from the Foreign Minister of Japan. The commendation belongs to the members of JACL. It is the members of the organization that serve over 100 communities across the nation. It is the members of JACL that advocate for equality for all Americans. It is the members of JACL that provide the social fabric of the community.

The new year is shaping up to be a call for action. A call for action to stand up for the rights of others. A call for action to meet with congressional offices and local elected officials.

A call for action to vote and encourage others to vote.

The Issei and Nisei worked to make their World War II prisons as normal as possible "for the children." Two thousand and sixteen will be a critical year that will affect the civil rights landscape for years to come. It is a year that we need to heed the call for action for the next generation