

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0505

March 28, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Support for Wakamatsu Colony preservation

I am pleased to offer my support to the American River Conservancy and the Sacramento, Placer and Florin Chapters of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and their campaign to raise \$4.6 million to preserve the site of the Wakamatsu Colony.

The Sacramento, Placer and Florin chapters of the JACL and the American River Conservancy have formed a partnership entitled the "Gold Hill – Wakamatsu Project" that seeks to acquire the historic 300 acre Veerkamp property at Gold Hill, a rural ranch in El Dorado County. The Gold Hill – Wakamatsu Project would establish a new state historical park on this site in commemoration of the first Japanese settlement in North America.

The Wakamatsu colony was founded in 1869 when a group of Japanese settlers arrived in California to establish a silk farming community. The colonists brought many items from Japan, including mulberry trees, silkworm cocoons, tea plants and a large banner bearing the crest of the Aizu Wakamatsu tribe. The colony struggled for a number of years due to lack of funds and an insufficient water supply; ultimately, the Japanese settlers had to abandon the settlement. However, many original artifacts from this settlement remain preserved by the California State Parks system. The original farmhouse, a gravestone of a young Japanese girl, and a state historical landmark serve as visual reminders of the site's legacy.

The Veerkamp family of Placerville, who has owned the land surrounding the Wakamatsu colony since the 19th century, is now interested in selling the ranch to the American River Conservancy (Conservancy), which regrettably does not yet have sufficient funds to purchase the property. Should the Conservancy fail to purchase the property, it is likely the land would be sold for commercial development. This is why the procurement of funds is so vital to the Gold Hill –Wakamatsu Project.

To many Japanese Americans, the Wakamatsu Colony is as symbolic as Plymouth Rock was for the first American colonists. Indeed, many Japanese tourists have visited the "Historical Landmark" placard. The Gold Hill –Wakamatsu Collaborative now has an historic opportunity to acquire this land and preserve the legacy of these early Japanese Americans. Moreover, the establishment of a state historical park would prevent development on the site and ensure that the natural habitat is preserved for future generations of visitors.

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I have great confidence in the Gold Hill – Wakamatsu Project, and I am pleased to support their fundraising efforts. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my Sacramento office at (916) 498-5600.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doris O. Matsui". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

DORIS O. MATSUI
Member of Congress

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