

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0530



**Introduction of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and
Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act**

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

california

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Mr. BECERRA: Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act. This bill would create a commission to review and determine facts and circumstances surrounding the relocation, internment, and deportation of Japanese Latin Americans, and subsequently recommend appropriate remedies.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the day that then President D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that led to the internment of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry. With the stroke of a pen, innocent men, women, and children became prisoners and were branded disloyal to the nation they called home. Lives were disrupted and homes were broken as these Americans were uprooted from their communities and locked behind barbed wire fences. Over the past years, the anniversary of this date has been nationally observed with educational events to increase public awareness about the World War II experience, recognize the unjust action, and to provide an opportunity for all people to reflect on the importance of justice and civil liberties during times of crisis and war.

The 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians concluded that the internment was the result of racism and wartime hysteria. Five years after publishing its findings, then President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that provided an official apology and financial redress to most of the Japanese Americans who were subjected to wrongdoing and confined in U.S. internment camps during World War II. Those loyal Americans were vindicated by the fact that not a single documented case of sabotage or espionage was committed by a Japanese American during that time. The Civil Liberties Act was the culmination of a half century of struggle to bring justice to those for whom it was denied. I am proud that our nation did the right thing. But 19 years after the passage of this act, there still remains unfinished work to completely rectify and close this regrettable chapter in our nation's history.

Between December 1941 and February 1945, approximately 2,300 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry became the victims of mass abduction and forcible deportation from 13 Latin American countries to the United States. The U.S. government orchestrated and financed the deportation of Japanese Latin Americans to be used as hostages in exchange for Americans held by Japan. Over 800 individuals were included in two prisoner of war exchanges between the U.S. and Japan, where many were deported

to a foreign country that they had never set foot on since their ancestors' immigration to Latin America. The remaining Japanese Latin Americans were imprisoned in internment camps without the benefit of due process rights until after the end of the war.

Further study of the events surrounding the deportation and incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans is both merited and necessary. The 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians acknowledged the federal actions in detaining and interning civilians of enemy or foreign nationality, particularly of Japanese ancestry, but the commission had not thoroughly researched the historical documents that exist in distant archives pertaining to Japanese Latin Americans.

It is for all these reasons, Madam Speaker, that I rise today to introduce the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act. We must review directives of the United States military forces and the State Department requiring the relocation, detention in internment camps, and deportation of Japanese Latin Americans to Axis countries and recommend appropriate remedies based upon preliminary findings by the original commission and new discoveries. It is the right thing to do to affirm our commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

I am proud that there are many Members of Congress and community activists who have come together in this continuous fight for justice. I especially thank Representatives Dan Lungren, Mike Honda, and Chris Cannon for their commitment to this issue and joining me in this effort. The Campaign for Justice and the Japanese American Citizens League have been the vanguard organizations driving this effort.

Madam Speaker, let us renew our resolve to build a better future for our community by dedicating ourselves to remembering how we compromised liberty in the past by passing the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act. Doing so will help us guard it more closely in the future and help us commit ourselves to justice.