

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A new project that strives to promote reunification of family members in the United States and North Korea was launched this week by the Korean American Coalition of the Midwest and the Eugene Bell Foundation. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31) who has made family reunification one of his priorities during his tenure in the House of Representatives wrote the project organizers to thank them for undertaking this historic effort.

Calling the project “Saemsori,” or “voice of spring water” in Korean, the coalition said it will start with three projects – establishing a nationwide survey to determine how many separated Korean families included relatives living in the U.S., creating a central database, and archiving letters, photos and oral histories. The project will create a clearinghouse of information that will help families both find and communicate with loved ones in North Korea.

“Successful reunifications are threatened by the passage of time. It has been too long since families were separated by an unfortunate chapter in world history,” Rep Becerra wrote in his letter.

Below is the letter that Rep. Becerra sent to the Eugene Bell Foundation and was read at Saemsori’s official launch on Wednesday, February 8:

February 8, 2006

Dear Friends:

I wish to extend my sincerest congratulations to the Eugene Bell Foundation for its efforts to launch the Saemsoori project, which strives to promote reunification of family members in the United States and North Korea. The Eugene Bell Foundation's efforts as a constructive voice for families torn apart by the tragedy of war are to be recognized and commended.

There are as many as 500,000 Korean Americans who share the unimaginable pain of being separated from their families since the outbreak of the Korean War. Although family reunions initiated by the South Korean government recently have included Koreans living abroad, not all families in the United States are given the opportunity.

Of the nearly 500,000 Americans who have relatives in North Korea, only 84 thus far have been allowed the opportunity to connect with separated family members.

Travel and communication between Korean Americans in the United States and relatives in North Korea is difficult if not impossible.

Desperate to see their loved ones, some have traveled without authorization to see their family members at risk of being arrested by the North Korean government.

Successful reunifications are threatened by the passage of time. It has been more than 55

years since families were separated by an unfortunate chapter in world history.

The Saemsoni project helps these divided families by encouraging our government to create practical and lasting solutions for reuniting them.

The project will create a clearinghouse of information that will help families both find and communicate with loved ones in North Korea through letters, audio and video messages.

I congratulate the Eugene Bell Foundation for undertaking this significant project and am confident that they will succeed in restoring hope for many families who have been apart for far too long.

Sincerely,

XAVIER BECERRA

Member of Congress

Rep. Becerra currently serves as the vice-chair of U.S.-Republic of Korea Interparliamentary Exchange, an Executive Board member of Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) and is an active member of the Congressional Korea Caucus. In the fall of 2001 during the 107th Congress, Rep. Becerra introduced and successfully passed by unanimous voice vote H.Con.Res.77, which made it the official position of the United States Congress to

support further reunifications between family members.

To learn more about the Saemsoni project, please visit www.saemsoni.org .

Becerra.house.gov