

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Representative Xavier Becerra (CA - 30) sent a letter to President Bush prior to his trip to Asia last month requesting that he put Korean family unification on his list of priorities as he advances his foreign policy agenda in Asia. Joining Rep. Becerra in signing this letter were Reps. Ed Royce (CA - 39) and David Wu (OR - 1), and Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA). Reps. Becerra and Royce are the Vice Chair and Chair, respectively, of the U.S. Korea Interparliamentary Council, and David Wu serves as Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific Caucus.

The topic of Korean family unification was first taken up in the House of Representatives when Reps. Becerra and Royce introduced House Concurrent Resolution 77 back in March of 2001. The resolution was debated late last year and subsequently passed unanimously 420-0 on November 28, 2001

. Rep. Becerra labeled the victory as a "crucial first step in the crusade to reunify families who have gone far too long without seeing each other."

Korean unification was quickly taken up in the Senate and was sponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA). The resolution, Senate Concurrent Resolution 90, passed unanimously on December 20, 2001

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The text of the letter to the President reads as follows:

February 15, 2002

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As principal sponsors of the Korean American family reunification resolution, we are writing to respectfully urge you to support Congressional and community efforts to reunite Korean Americans with their family members in North Korea. We hope that you will have the opportunity to raise this issue in your upcoming meeting with Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) President Kim Dae Jung, who has also supported family reunions between North and South Korea

Recently, the House and Senate unanimously passed companion resolutions (H. Con. Res. 77 and S. Con. Res. 90) calling for the support of Congress and the President for the efforts of Korean Americans who wish to reunite with their family members in North Korea. The resolutions state that such efforts should be made in a timely manner, as 50 years have passed

since the separation of these families. We would hope to keep in sight a serious human rights issue, family reunification.

After the 1953 armistice officially ending the Korean War, the 38th parallel divided the two Koreas and millions of Koreans found themselves permanently separated from their family members. Almost 50 years later a great tragedy is still felt. The leaders of North and South Korea, in June of 2000, closed their historic first meeting by issuing a joint declaration promising to hold reunions of divided Korean families and to promote economic cooperation. Three reunions have taken place so far from August 2000 to February 2001. However, the hope for reunification remains distant for Korean Americans in the United States who have not been involved in the selection process for the family reunions.

Nearly one-third of the one million people of Korean ancestry who live in the U.S. have relatives in North Korea, many of whom they have not seen in half a century. Non-governmental travel and communication is nearly impossible between families in North Korea and the U.S. Currently, the Korean American Family Reunification Council has collected over 120,000 signatures from people in the U.S. asking the leaders of the United States, South Korea and North Korea, to allow reunions between Korean Americans and North Korean family members. In July 2001, as part of the official U.S.-South Korea Inter-Parliamentary Exchange, several members of Congress hosted members of the R.O.K. Parliament, who expressed enthusiasm about H. Con. Res. 77.

Mr. President, your leadership on the issue of Korean American family reunification can ensure that the United States continues to be a champion of human rights by helping thousands of war-torn families fulfill a lifelong desire to see their loved ones before they die. As a priority, our country is pushing for greater accord among nations to prevent fear and violence from overwhelming freedom and peace, and we cannot forget the essential bonds of stability that families have for centuries provided. We request your assistance to reunite Korean Americans with family members in North Korea. Again, as fifty years have already passed since the separation of these families, the timing of these reunions is urgent.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein

Xavier Becerra

Senator

Member of Congress

Edward Royce
Member of Congress

David Wu
Member of Congress

Since the historic summit in 2000 between South Korean President Kim Dae Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, several reunions have taken place between divided Korean families and more families anxiously await a chance to meet with relatives. However, the hope for reunification remains distant for Korean Americans in the United States that have not yet been

allowed to be involved with the selection process for the family reunions. H. Con. Res. 77/S. Con. Res. 90 calls on Congress and the President to support the efforts of Korean Americans who wish to reunite with their family members in North Korea

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