



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MERVYN M. DYMALLY

Before the Subcommittee on Administrative Law and  
Government Relations

In Support of National Redress Legislation, H.R. 4110

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Chairman Hall and Members of the Subcommittee, I appear before you today as the Congressional representative for the city of Gardena, California, one of the largest communities of Nikkei citizens in the continental United States. In speaking for these American citizens, I believe I also reflect the views of thousands of other Nikkei and Aleuts who were victims of one of the most glaring injustices Americans have ever committed against fellow Americans. For it is true that the majority of those individuals of Japanese ancestry who were uprooted and interned under Executive Order 9066 were the American sons and daughters of Issei or first generation immigrant parents. Let me emphasize to you that these Isseis were themselves ineligible for citizenship because of the congressionally mandated exclusionary laws. These racist laws were fashioned to keep Asians from immigrating to the United States. They also withheld citizenship from Asians who had already immigrated. Many of those Asian immigrants were brought to this country by American capitalists to provide cheap labor to build our railroads.

It is the human tragedy of the internment which I wish to focus on this morning. The suffering caused by the internment has been graphically and eloquently portrayed in the volumes of supporting documentation and the report compiled by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). As gripping as the Commission report is, I cannot help feeling that it fails to convey the depth of suffering because in truth the effects of that internment border on the incomprehensible. Consider that thousands of families, 110 thousand human beings, were physically removed from their homes, their community, and their extended families and allowed to bring with them only what they could carry. That in itself was a brutal act. Then these people--babies, pregnant women, and young children among



them--were incarcerated in remote internment camps. How does one measure the losses from these experiences? How much lost education was there? How many careers were destroyed and how many prevented from starting? How much property was lost? And how much lifelong bitterness and psychological trauma were inflicted on these fellow Americans? How do we measure the losses, and how do we make recompense to a people first rejected through our racism and then singled out for a cruelty we did not choose to mete out to German Americans or Italian Americans whose ancestral homelands we were also at war with? The loss is incalculable.

Yet we do know that it was the government of the United States acting against the counsel of some of its own officials that gave the order and carried out the evacuation and the internment of these Americans. The government must offer recompense.

As deep as the suffering of the Nikkei survivors is, it must be admitted that loss of life is the most profound suffering. This was the fate of many Aleuts who like the Nikkei were rounded up and interned. They were housed in unsanitary canneries in conditions so deplorable that they suffered an awesome disease and mortality rate--the highest of any group interned. The bill before you, H.R. 4110 only begins to address the misery and the death caused by Executive Order 9066.

#### Recommendations of the Commission and H.R. 4110

If we believe in simple justice, then the recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians must be honored! Their implementation will begin to ameliorate the wrongs which were committed; their implementation will begin to heal the wounds inflicted on Americans of Japanese descent; at last, their implementation will provide individuals and



communities the recompense that is their due.

I support the commission's recommendations. They are clearly warranted and amply justified by the information contained in the voluminous documentation compiled by the Commission. The key recommendations which should be implemented are these:

- A congressional apology to the Japanese American people;
- A Presidential pardon for convictions resulting from enforcement of Executive Order 9066 where the offenses were based on a refusal to accept treatment due to race or ethnicity;
- Establishment of a community fund for educational purposes; and
- Individual monetary restitution for those who were incarcerated in the internment centers.

I also support reparations for the Aleuts including an official apology for the injustices they suffered. Funds should be authorized and appropriated to rebuild churches, buildings, and other property damaged by U.S. military personnel occupying the Aleutian islands. And recompense should be provided directly to the Aleuts who survived the internment.

Regarding this issue of individual monetary compensation to both the Japanese Americans and Aleuts, I am puzzled that the Commission and H.R. 4110 recommend compensation of \$20,000 for Japanese American evacuees but recommend only \$5,000 for each Aleut. I strongly believe that this Subcommittee should evaluate the logic and reasoning behind these differing figures. In general, however, while monetary compensation alone will not right the wrongs committed against individual evacuees, I do believe that monetary compensation is appropriate. The notion of monetary compensation for damage is clearly sustained in American law and practice. An official



government policy of incarcerating innocent Americans and Aleutian islanders caused them loss of property, loss of the means of livelihood, loss of education and inflicted psychological and physical damage. These people should have been protected by the Constitution and the requirement of due process. Their rights were suspended under the authority Congress provides for use of emergency powers during a period of war. The reasons used to justify this extraordinary use of war powers have not been substantiated, and indeed, they were believed to be insubstantial at the time they were given. It seems evident that the government acted improperly against the evacuees. The government should, therefore, pay the individuals to partially offset their losses. That is simple justice.

I began my testimony by saying that the trauma caused the evacuees borders on the incomprehensible. But I do not think the magnitude of their suffering should dissuade this Subcommittee from listening to these people and trying to understand the depth of their anguish. The members of this Subcommittee need to relive through the testimony of the Nikkei the hysteria and the historical circumstances which allowed this trampling of justice to occur under the guise of an emergency. This Subcommittee needs to understand the historical backdrop of this affair: The greed that led some to covet the land and property of the Nikkei, the deep-seated prejudice, the willingness to exclude Asians from the rights of citizenship and from citizenship itself. It is only against this backdrop that the recommendation of funding for community renewal and individual redress can be fully appreciated. It is only against this backdrop that the Subcommittee can understand the modesty of the recommendations forwarded by the Commission and embodied in H.R. 4110.

For this reason, I request this Subcommittee to seek out, to talk to, and



to listen to the survivors of the internment and to their family members. They will help you see this shameful episode in its true form. I am confident that when we in the Congress come to understand this episode as they do, we will also come to share the outrage they have kept so deep inside themselves for so many years. We will know as they do that justice has not been done. In this instance, to paraphrase the great statesman Mr. Gladstone, "Justice delayed is justice denied". Let us deny justice no longer. We can begin to heal the wounds of the past by favorable consideration of H.R. 4110. We can show the world that in the United States justice triumphs even if it takes forty years.