

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

To create a Commission to investigate facts and circumstances about the relocation, internment, and deportation of Latin Americans of Japanese descent

Sponsors: Senator Daniel Inouye (HI)
Rep. Xavier Becerra (CA-31)

CONTEXT

The United States interned over 110,000 people of Japanese descent during WWII and approximately 2,300 of these people were kidnapped from Latin America by the American military with the help of Latin American government officials. Over 800 of Japanese Latin Americans were used for Prisoner of War exchanges with Japan. The U.S. government issued an apology and monetary reparations for its wartime violation against these internees through the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. While this Act addressed many of the civil rights violations, it did not bring relief for Japanese Latin Americans who were abducted and unlawfully interned in the U.S. After the war, there were only about 797 Japanese Latin Americans seeking redress. A significant number of them have passed away since then. Many Japanese Latin Americans who remained in the United States sought permanent residency and have become citizens of the United States.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BILL

This bill would create a commission to investigate and determine facts and circumstances surrounding the relocation, internment, and deportation of Japanese Latin Americans. The commissioners would be composed of 9 members, 3 each appointed by the President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President pro tempore of the Senate. The commission would be charged with submitting a report of its findings and recommend appropriate remedies to Congress.

SUPPORTERS OF THE BILL

Campaign For Justice, Japanese American Citizens League, and Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress support this bill. The sponsors, Senator Daniel Inouye (HI) and Rep. Xavier Becerra (CA-31), hope to gain bipartisan support.

COSPONSORS OF THE BILL

Joining Senator Inouye in introducing the legislation are six original co-sponsors of the legislation – Democratic Senators Daniel K. Akaka of Hawaii, Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont, and Carl Levin of Michigan, and Republican Senators Robert F. Bennett of Utah, and Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens, both of Alaska. On the house side, Representative Becerra is joined by Representatives Daniel Lungren (CA-3), Mike Honda (CA-15), and Chris Cannon (UT-03).

Summary of “Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act”

FINDINGS

In 1982, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians found that approximately 2,300 men, women, and children of Japanese descent were uprooted from their homes in Latin America and detained in internment camps in the United States, and in some cases, deported to Japan to enable the United States to conduct prisoner exchanges. They were not covered by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which formally apologized and provided compensation payments to former Japanese Americans interned pursuant to Executive Order 9066.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION

The commission would be composed of 9 members: 3 each appointed by the President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President pro tempore of the Senate. The President shall call the first meeting of the commission within 60 days that this act is enacted or within 30 days after legislation making appropriations to carry out this act is enacted.

DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

- Investigate and determine facts and circumstances surrounding the United States’ relocation, internment, and deportation of Latin Americans of Japanese descent, and the impacts of those actions by the United States
- Recommend appropriate remedies, if any, based on preliminary findings by the original commission and new discoveries

Not later than one year after the date of the first meeting, the commission shall submit a written report on its findings and recommendations to Congress.

POWERS OF THE COMMISSION

The commission shall hold public hearings, give testimony, receive evidence, and administer oaths; may also issue and enforce subpoenas requiring the attendance and testimony of witnesses, as well as producing other physical evidence and materials.

PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

A commission member who is not an officer or employee of the federal government shall be compensated for each day, including travel time, during which the member is engaged in commission duties. A commission member who is an officer or employee of the United States shall serve without compensation.

TERMINATION

The commission shall terminate its duties and performances 90 days after the date on which the commission submits its report to Congress.

AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

Funding shall be appropriated for the fiscal year 2007, and shall remain available, without fiscal year limitation, until expended. [Cost estimate pending Congressional Budgeting Office review.]