

Source A: Excerpts from United States House of Representatives, debate over the Civil Liberties Act, Conference Report on H.R. 442 (excerpts), 1988

Mr. Glickman:

Mr. Speaker, this is a great day for America, because it bears witness to the unique and special greatness of America that we are today repaying American citizens for injustices suffered during World War II as a result of denial of due process. Very few other societies or countries would do what we Americans are doing today.

Mr. Speaker, this bill proves our respect for human rights and liberties is paramount. This bill also establishes a historical precedent that this will never happen again to any racial, religious, ethnic group or individual—that those folks will be deprived of due process because of their background.

Mr. Speaker, behind me is a statement by Daniel Webster. He closes the remarks by saying, “And let us see whether we in our day and in our generation may not perform something worthy to be remembered.”

We are doing that today.

— US Representative Dan Glickman (Democrat, KS)

Mr. Frenzel:

Mr. Speaker, when this bill was before us, I criticized its appropriateness, and as I frequently do, criticized the spending of money in the amounts called for. I spoke my piece, and I lost the argument.

Through the good work of a host of managers, the bill has been improved and has moved forward. A national apology will be offered when this bill is passed today. One of the managers, a particular friend, the gentleman from California [Mr. Matsui], has been most gracious in talking to me about this bill and explaining what his aspirations for it are.

Partly as a result of those discussions, I see this bill now as an important national apology. As such, it is one which should be made by all of us, and for all of the people of this country. Therefore, on this vote I am going to swallow my objections on appropriateness and unnecessary spending and I will reverse my vote against the bill.

Mr. Speaker, it is a time for apology, healing, and reunification, and I intend to be a part of it.

— U.S. Representative Bill Frenzel (Republican, MN)

Mr. Panetta:

Mr. Speaker, enactment of this legislation will bring to a close a painful chapter in this Nation's history. The forced internment of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, most of them American citizens, was a national shame.

Extraordinary sacrifices occur in times of national crisis, and we recognize that thousands of Americans lost their lives in that conflict. The war exacted a price that can never be repaid. What they fought for, what they fought and died for, was a Nation that respects basic freedoms, justice, and rights. Their sacrifice is the very reason we have the responsibility of coming to terms with this tragic moment of our history. That is the lesson we all must learn.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report for the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, which will provide restitution to Japanese Americans interned and relocated during World War II, an apology to these people, and an education fund to ensure the future study of this tragic moment of American history.

The treatment of Japanese Americans in the months following the attack on Pearl Harbor has long been a source of controversy and debate in this country. On February [19], 1942, 10 weeks after America's entrance in the war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 giving the Secretary of War and regional military commanders the power to exclude any and all persons from designated areas for security reasons. In the end, more than 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry—two-thirds of whom were American citizens—were uprooted from along the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington and interned in remote relocation camps.

Today, more than 40 years later, the controversy surrounding that decision continues. Congress moved in 1980 to address this sensitive issue by establishing a bipartisan Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to examine the circumstances leading up to the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the west coast and their subsequent detention under armed guard.

After months of hearings and extensive examination of public records, the Commission reported in January 1983 that circumstances in this country during the war did not warrant the internment of thousands of Japanese Americans. In support of this conclusion, the Commission reported that there was not a single documented act of espionage or subversion committed by an American of Japanese heritage on the west coast. The Commission also noted the unequal treatment of suspected nationals, pointing out that no mass exclusion or detention was ordered against Americans of German or Italian descent.

Frankly, we all recognize the necessity of extraordinary measures in times of national crisis. Mandatory military service and gas and food rationing were but a few of the hardships and sacrifices that touched the lives of all Americans during World War II. For the thousands of young Americans who lost their lives in that conflict, the war exacted a price that can never be repaid.

The question before Congress and the Nation is whether, some 40 years after the fact, we should try to compensate for losses suffered by Americans of Japanese ancestry. I believe that we must come to terms with this tragic moment of our history. The education programs provided for in the bill will finally give this nearly forgotten casualty of World War II the attention it deserves. Children in schools across the Nation will learn about the cruelties of war and racism.

Too many young Americans are unaware of the events of World War II. For a variety of reasons the Japanese internment camps are not given adequate attention in the classrooms of the United States. At a time when young people are learning about the controversial events that occurred in Vietnam, so should they be learning of the assault on liberties that occurred right here in the United States during World War II. The money authorized in the bill specifically for education will ensure that future generations will know of these events and learn from them. While I recognize the concern of some over the price of this legislation, the price of not taking this action seems even higher. Only through a knowledge of history can similar events be avoided in the future.

US Representative Leon Panetta (Democrat, CA)

Mr. Coble:

Mr. Speaker, I yield myself my remaining 4 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I am not comfortable rising to oppose this bill because some will accuse me of being insensitive and uncaring. It is inaccurate. Many proponents of the bill are Members of this house for whom I have the highest regard, and that compounds my discomfort.

I cannot argue to my colleagues that this legislation does not represent a humane gesture by

the United States, nor can I argue that Americans of Japanese descent who were living on the west coast of the United States did not experience a horrendous and regrettable interruption of their lives and livelihoods during World War II because of the relocation program.

I can, however, argue, Mr. Speaker, that in a time of war when a country is threatened for its very survival, as this country was after Pearl Harbor in 1942, many things happen and many lives are disrupted for no logical reason.

Many travesties of justice occur during a time of war. Many people lost their lives during World War II. Many people's lives were disrupted against their will, and this country went to war in order to help stop the further loss of lives.

I believe it is unfair and perhaps even presumptuous for us to sit in the calm of this House, thousands of miles away from any threat of war today, with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, and pass judgment of the decision made by President Roosevelt, his Secretary of War, and other members of his Cabinet during the threat of war which faced them in 1942 following the attack on the front line of defense at Pearl Harbor.

Was there perhaps war hysteria? No doubt. Was there perhaps racial prejudice involved? No doubt.

Was there a failure of political leadership? I think not. We joined that war and helped our allies win it.

But the decisions which are being questioned today, Mr. Speaker, were intertwined with a threatened national security.

I furthermore have reservations about the precedent that we may be setting in passing legislation of this kind. I do not believe that this Government can make restitution for every wrong committed by it during a time of global war, and where do we draw the line. Perhaps descendants of slaves, perhaps American Indians who were forced from their ancestral grounds and placed upon reservations. The potential is endless.

Our office has received many letters from our veterans who fought in the Second World War who disagree with this bill, and the tone of their letters is generally the same. Many of them fought and were injured in World War II in conflict with our enemies. Some lost friends and loved ones as a result of the attack upon Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I have no problems with the United States apologizing to those citizens of Japanese descent who were interned during the Second World War or whose lives were disrupted and detrimentally so during that war. And there are, furthermore, many people who should be recipients of apologies for acts that were done to them during the time of war. But it is a problem, Mr. Speaker, that cannot be simply and summarily resolved after the fact through

legislation.

— US Representative Howard Coble (Republican, NC)

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