

WASHINGTON, DC – Seeking to rectify an egregious wrong committed by our government during World War II, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), with Representatives Daniel Lungren (CA-3) and Mike Honda (CA-15), today introduced the “Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act of 2006.”

If signed into law, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act of 2006 would create a commission to investigate and study the wartime violations committed by the U.S. government against Japanese Latin Americans during World War II and make recommendations to Congress for any appropriate remedies based on their findings. The commission would be composed of nine members, three each appointed by the President, the Speaker of the House, and the President pro tempore of the Senate.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians hearings, the conclusions of which led to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that provided an official apology and financial redress to most of the Japanese Americans who were subjected to wrongdoing and confined in U.S. internment camps during World War II. This act was the culmination of a half century of struggle to bring justice to those to whom it was denied.

“Eighteen years after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act, there still remains unfinished work to completely rectify and close this regrettable chapter in our nation’s history,” Rep. Becerra said.

Between December 1941 and February 1948, approximately 2,300 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry became the victims of mass abduction and forcible deportation from 13 Latin American countries to the United States. The U.S. government orchestrated and financed the deportation of Japanese Latin Americans to be used as hostages in exchange for Americans held by Japan. Over 800 individuals were included in two prisoner of war exchanges between the U.S. and Japan. The remaining Japanese Latin Americans were imprisoned in internment camps without the benefit of due process rights until after the end of the war.

An identical version of Rep. Becerra's legislation was introduced in the United States Senate on February 16 by Senator Daniel K. Inouye (HI). Joining Sen. Inouye on the bill were Sens. Ted Stevens (AK), Patrick Leahy (VT) and Carl Levin (MI).

"When I first learned of the wartime experiences of Japanese Latin Americans, it seemed unfathomable," Sen. Inouye said. "But it happened. It is part of our national history, and it is a part of the living histories of the many families whose lives are forever tied to our country's internment camps. I believe that by examining what happened, we will give finality to, and complete the account of federal actions to detain and intern civilians of Japanese ancestry."

"Further study of the events surrounding the deportation and incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans is both merited and necessary," Rep. Becerra said. "While most Americans are aware of the internment of Japanese Americans, few know about our government's activities in other countries resulting from prejudice held against people of Japanese ancestry. Only by dedicating ourselves to remembering how we compromised liberty in the past can we renew our resolve for a better future for our community, and I am so very grateful to Senator Inouye for helping lead this effort to affirm our commitment to democracy and the rule of law. I especially thank Representatives Lungren and Honda for their commitment to this issue. Additionally, I recognize and thank Campaign for Justice and the Japanese American Citizens League's advocacy in bringing this important issue into the light of day."

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*The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac>.*