

Testimony of Congressman Jim Wright
Majority Leader
On H.R. 4110
Subcommittee on
Administrative Law and Governmental Relations
June 20, 1984

Mr. Chairman, and Members of this Subcommittee, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of H.R. 4110, "a bill to accept the findings and to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians."

This hearing comes at a particularly appropriate time, given the recent ceremonies in Europe commemorating the courage and heroism and sacrifices of the Allied troops who stormed the beaches of Normandy and thereby marked the beginning of the end of Hitler's reign of terror.

The selfless courage displayed by American, Canadian and British troops on D-Day forty years ago contrasts unfavorably with the shameful actions this nation undertook in rounding up and detaining thousands of American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry during that same war. Section 101 of H.R. 4110 specifically recognizes the injustice of the actions of our government and, on behalf of the nation, issues an apology. That section reads as follows:

"The Congress accepts the findings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians and recognizes that a grave injustice was done to both citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry by the evacuation, relocation, and internment of civilians during World War II. On behalf of the Nation, the Congress apologizes."

Mr. Chairman, I believe very deeply that the heroism and self-sacrifice of D-Day is a better and more accurate reflection of our national character. There are other examples of uncommon valor during World War II. The 442d Infantry Regimental Combat Team, a crack unit whose patriotic devotion and fighting courage are almost legend, was composed of brave Americans of Japanese ancestry,

some of whom volunteered to serve and fight while being detained unjustly in internment camps.

Now, that's patriotism!

The 442d, which included my good friend Dan Inouye, the distinguished senior Senator from Hawaii, broke through enemy lines in Italy after other units had failed. Facing enormous danger and despite heavy losses, these brave men rescued a substantial part of the 36th Division which had found itself trapped and surrounded. Many of my very good friends in Texas who served in the 36th Division owe their lives to the heroism of the soldiers of the 442d Infantry Regimental Combat Team.

While Americans of Japanese ancestry fought and died on the field of battle, their civilian counterparts were being rounded up like cattle. The internment of civilians during World War II, on no grounds other than their racial heritage, was a grotesque aberration, totally unrepresentative of all that is good and compassionate and just in our history and our legal system.

Admittedly, those actions were taken during a time of great national stress. But great national stress cannot be used as an excuse to defend or to justify behavior which, upon reflection, we know to be wrong. Those actions were taken during a time of great national stress. But great national stress cannot be used as an excuse to defend or to justify behavior which, upon reflection, we know to be wrong.

It takes a big person to admit wrongdoing, to apologize for an injustice inflicted on someone else. Likewise, it takes a big, compassionate country to redress the shame and the injury it caused others.

America is such a country. We are an honest people. We seek justice. Our magnanimity has always been our strength. I looked up the definition of magnanimity and would like to share it with you, because I believe it expresses precisely the motivation embodied by the legislation before us. Magnanimity is defined as a "loftiness of spirit enabling one to bear trouble calmly, to disdain meanness and revenge, and to make sacrifices for worthy ends."

The bill I have introduced disdains meanness and revenge; it makes some sacrifices for a worthy end. H.R. 4110 provides compensation in the amount of \$20,000 to every living individual of Japanese ancestry who suffered detention or loss of property. In addition, the bill provides \$5,000 to living individuals of Alaskan Aleut ancestry who were evacuated and relocated during World War II.

Even as great a country as we are, America cannot measure up against a standard of perfection. We have experienced lapses from time-to-time. By and large, though, our history is that of a magnanimous, compassionate people, desirous of doing right, anxious to adhere to the rule of law, indeed, abiding to the maximum extent to the Golden Rule -- treating others as we would want them to treat us.

We did not live up to that honorable tradition in our treatment of loyal American citizens and residents during World War II. We can never fully repay those proud and loyal Americans for having questioned their patriotism during that dark time. H.R. 4110 allows us an opportunity to right a grievous wrong. I urge the Subcommittee to support this bill.