SENATE RESOLUTION

8620

By Senators Hasegawa, Hobbs, Brown, Wellman, Kuderer, Darneille, Das, Hunt, Salomon, Schoesler, Lovelett, Wilson, C., Billig, Saldaña, Zeiger, Frockt, Palumbo, and Fortunato

WHEREAS, Seventy-seven years ago, on February 19, 1942, during World War II, persons of Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese ancestry, including United States citizens, were ordered to live in concentration camps and subject to a strict curfew; and

WHEREAS, Over 120,000 United States citizens and permanent residents of Japanese ancestry were required to leave their homes on the West Coast and submit to imprisonment based solely on their ancestry. This was required by Civilian Exclusion Order 34 which was authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066; and

WHEREAS, The first civilian evacuation order gave Japanese Americans from Bainbridge Island less than one week to leave behind homes, personal belongings, farms, businesses, friends, and family; allowed them only two suitcases of personal belongings; and transported them to hastily constructed detention centers, like Camp Harmony located in the horse stalls on the grounds of the Washington State Fair in Puyallup where they were held until more permanent concentration camps could be built in more remote locations, like Hunt, Idaho (Minidoka) and Tule Lake, California, which is where most Japanese Americans from the Puget Sound region were held; and

WHEREAS, This drastic course of action allegedly aimed to prevent acts of espionage and sabotage by Japanese Americans who were deemed untrustworthy and disloyal to the United States even though no evidence was ever presented to support such distrust; and

WHEREAS, On March 23, 1943, the War Department organized a segregated unit of Japanese Americans; and, from within those American concentration camps where they and their families were incarcerated, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards, thousands responded to questions of their loyalty and patriotism by volunteering to serve in the segregated Army unit known as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which went on to amass a battle record unmatched in United States military history earning 7 Presidential Unit Citations, 21 Medals of Honor, 29 Distinguished Service Crosses, a Distinguished Service Medal, 588 Silver Stars, more than 4,000 Bronze Stars, 22 Legion of Merit Medals, 15 Soldier's Medals, 9,486 Purple Hearts, and a total of 16 decorations from the governments of France and Italy; and

WHEREAS, Equally loyal and patriotic Japanese Americans fought to protect our constitutional rights and liberties through dissent, like Minoru Yasui; Fred Korematsu; and University of Washington student Gordon Hirabayashi who was arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for defying the military curfew on select civilians and challenging the constitutionality of the exclusion and incarceration orders. Korematsu and Hirabayashi were eventually awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for their principled actions and sacrifices; and

WHEREAS, In 1982, the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians found "no military or security reason for the internment" of persons of Japanese ancestry. Rather, it found the denial of constitutional rights "was caused by racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership"; and

WHEREAS, In 1976, President Gerald Ford rescinded Executive Order 9066 saying, "I call upon the American people to affirm with me this American Promise—that we have learned from the tragedy of that long-ago experience forever to treasure liberty and justice for each individual American, and resolve that this kind of action shall never again be repeated"; and

WHEREAS, In 1979, newly elected Washington State Congressman Mike Lowry introduced H.R. 5977: The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which was signed 10 years later by President Ronald Reagan who said, "So what is most important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor, for here, we admit a wrong. Here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law."; and

WHEREAS, In 2010, the United States Congress recognized the unparalleled record of Nisei soldiers by awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) of the United States Army who fought in the Pacific Theater as interpreters and code breakers; and

WHEREAS, Throughout Washington State, survivors of the European and Asian Pacific battlefields of World War II and of American incarceration camps continue to live their golden years in quiet contrast to their extraordinary acts of patriotism, conscience, and valor;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That on this auspicious occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066, the Washington State Senate, along with the people of Washington State, pause to acknowledge and reflect on the significance of Executive Order 9066 and its effect in denying constitutional freedoms and protections. We also reflect on our democracy's greatness in recognizing the need to correct this failure, the need for constant vigilance to protect our constitutional rights and freedoms; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we recognize the Japanese American internees, constitutional protectors, and World War II veterans from the state of Washington; honor their patience, heroism, sacrifice, and loyalty; and remember the lessons, rights, and responsibilities that come with the phrase, "liberty and justice for all"; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be immediately transmitted by the Secretary of the Senate to the Nisei Veterans Committee, the Military Intelligence Service-Northwest Association, the Japanese American Citizens League National and Seattle Chapter, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington State, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience.