

STATEMENT ON INTRODUCTION OF THE WARTIME TREATMENT STUDY ACT

March 10, 2009

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, today I introduce the Wartime Treatment Study Act. This bill would create two fact-finding commissions: one commission to review the treatment by our government during World War II of American citizens or residents of German or Italian descent and Persons of European descent living in Latin American countries, and another commission to review the U.S. government's treatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution during World War II. This bill is long overdue.

I am very pleased that my colleagues Senators Grassley, Kennedy, Lieberman, Cardin and Wyden have joined me as cosponsors of this important bill. I thank them for their support. And I thank Congressman Wexler, who has been the unflagging champion of this legislation and will be introducing an identical bill in the House of Representatives.

The victory of America and its allies in the Second World War was a triumph for freedom, justice, and human rights. The courage displayed by so many Americans, of all ethnic origins, should be a source of great pride for all Americans.

But, at the same time that so many brave Americans fought for freedom in Europe and the Pacific, the U.S. government was curtailing the freedom of people here at home. While it is, of course, the right of every nation to protect itself during wartime, the U.S. government must respect the basic freedoms for which so many Americans have given their lives. War tests our principles and our values. And as our nation's recent experience has shown, it is during times of war and conflict, when our fears are high and our principles are tested most, that we must be even more vigilant to guard against violations of the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Many Americans are aware that during World War II, under the authority of Executive Order 9066, our government forced more than 100,000 ethnic Japanese from their homes and ultimately into internment camps. Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes, their livelihoods, and their communities and were held behind barbed wire and military guard by their own government. Through the work of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, created by Congress in 1980, this shameful event finally received the official acknowledgement and condemnation it deserved.

While I commend our government for finally recognizing and apologizing for the mistreatment of Japanese Americans during World War II, I believe that it is time that the government also acknowledge the mistreatment experienced by American citizens or residents of German or Italian descent and Persons of European descent living in Latin American countries, as well as Jewish refugees.

The Wartime Treatment Study Act would create two independent, fact-finding commissions to review this unfortunate history, so that Americans can understand why it happened and work to ensure that it never happens again. One commission will review the

treatment by the U.S. government of German Americans, Italian Americans, and other European Americans, as well as European Latin Americans, during World War II.

Mr. President, I believe that most Americans are unaware that the U.S. government designated more than 600,000 Italian-born and 300,000 German-born United States resident aliens and their families as “enemy aliens.” The U.S. government unfairly subjected many to arrest, detainment, and relocation. Indeed, as was the case with Japanese Americans, approximately 11,000 ethnic Germans, 3,200 ethnic Italians, and scores of Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians or other European Americans living in America were taken from their homes and placed in internment camps during World War II. Even less well known is the U.S. policy coordinated with many Latin American countries that resulted in thousands of European Americans, including German and Austrian Jews, being arrested, shipped to the United States by U.S. military transport, and interned. Many European Americans and European Latin Americans were later repatriated or deported to European Axis nations during World War II, and some were exchanged for Americans and Latin Americans held in those nations. We must learn from this history and explore why failed to protect the basic freedoms of our fellow Americans and those brought here from Latin America.

A second commission created by this bill will review the treatment by the U.S. government of Jewish refugees who were fleeing Nazi persecution and genocide. We must review the facts here as well and determine how restrictive immigration policies failed to provide adequate safe harbor to Jewish refugees fleeing the persecution of Nazi Germany. It is a horrible truth that the United States turned away thousands of refugees, delivering many refugees to their deaths at the hands of the Nazi regime.

As I mentioned earlier, there has been a measure of justice for Japanese Americans who were denied their liberty and property. It is now time for the U.S. government to complete the accounting of this period in our nation’s history. It is time to create independent, fact-finding commissions to conduct a full and through review of the treatment of all European Americans, European Latin Americans, and Jewish refugees during World War II.

Up to this point, there has been no justice for the thousands of German Americans, Italian Americans, and other European Americans who were branded “enemy aliens” and then taken from their homes, subjected to curfews, limited in their travel, deprived of their personal property, and, in the worst cases, placed in internment camps.

There has been no justice for Latin Americans of European descent who were taken from their homes, shipped to the United States, and interned here.

There has been no justice for the European Americans and European Latin Americans who were repatriated or deported to hostile, war-torn European Axis powers, often in exchange for Americans being held in those countries.

Finally, there has been no justice for the thousands of Jews, like those aboard the German vessel the *St. Louis*, who sought refuge from hostile Nazi treatment but were callously turned away at America’s shores.

The injustices to European Americans, European Latin Americans, and Jewish refugees occurred more than sixty years ago. Americans must learn from these tragedies now, while the people who survived these injustices are still with us, and are still here to teach us. We cannot put this off any longer. Their numbers are rapidly dwindling. I spoke on the Senate floor in the last Congress about one such former internee, Max Ebel, who died still waiting for his country to acknowledge his internment and those of many other European Americans. If we wait any longer, even more people who were affected will no longer be here to know that Congress has at last recognized their sacrifice and resolved to learn from the mistakes of the past.

We should never allow this part of our nation's history to repeat itself. And, while we should be proud of our nation's triumph in World War II, we should not let that justifiable pride blind us to the treatment of some Americans by their own government.

I was very pleased that the Senate approved this bill by an overwhelming bipartisan majority as an amendment to the immigration bill in 2007. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the Wartime Treatment Study Act again this Congress, and to allow this bill to become law as soon as possible. I have been seeking to enact this legislation for eight years. It is long past time for a full accounting of this tragic chapter in our nation's history.

I ask that the full text of the Wartime Treatment Study Act be placed in the record following these remarks. Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.