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SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL AND
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
LONG-TERM CARE

Statement by Congressman Dan Lungren

Vice-Chairman

Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment
of Civilians

July 14, 1981
Washington, D.C.

Unfortunately, some people are already viewing the mere existence of this commission as yet another exercise in American "guilt tripping", yet another attempt to besmirch the honor of our nation by focusing on a unique and very unfortunate epoch in our history, or yet another attempt to prove that we are barbaric violators of our own constitutional guarantees. But such critics are wrong. This commission is nothing of the sort.

Indeed the mere existence of this commission is testimony to the fact that American people are eminently fair minded and just.

It truly is the mark of an honest, just and noble people that we can recognize the error of our World War II internment of Japanese American citizens and that we are intent on learning from our error and avoiding any future such infringement of constitutionally protected liberty.

While conditions in the World War II relocation camps were civil in comparison with the camps operated by the totalitarian regimes of Europe and other parts of the world, ^{it is} we Americans are inquiring into this denial of constitutional rights which occurred. This is testimony to our goodness as a people. We did not see Stalin voluntarily inquiring into the conditions in his murderous Gulags. We do not see the Soviets today inquiring into the barbaric treatment accorded Jews, Christians, and other minorities. We do not see Castro voluntarily inquiring into the conditions afforded the subjects of his island prison camp.

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We have been established by the United States Congress to inquire into the decisions and mistakes of our past and that is important evidence of the essential integrity of our system.

As we seek to flesh out and officially acknowledge the historical record of these events, it is important to consider that the internment of our fellow Americans of Japanese ancestry did not take place in a vacuum, but occurred in the context of highly charged events. The bulk of the U.S. Navy had been destroyed by a surprise attack. The U.S. Army was soundly routed and beat a hasty retreat from the Phillipines. The West Coast of our country braced for attack with nightly "blackouts" and a variety of other civil defense measures.

I looked back over a copy of the Los Angeles Times of 1942 wherein the editors railed over fears of a Japanese "fifth column" in the United States.

Unfortunately, even Americans of otherwise good will were caught up in a frenzy of fear and suspicion.

Such facts certainly do not ameliorate the culpability of our government in this action, but they issue a challenge to those of us on this commission. How do we effectively create - as some have called it - an insurance policy so that such actions are not repeated in a future crisis.

I originally supported the establishment of this commission/ so that Americans would be made aware of and/or would remember this black mark in our nation's history. Growing up in Southern California I first remember hearing of the internment as a young boy and I recall my amazement that such a thing could have happened. I grew up in a community where Japanese American citizens were known as solid, productive citizens. I was astonished to learn

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a few decades earlier they had been removed from the general society and deprived of liberty and property.

I believe that one of the most fruitful aspects of the formation of this commission is that it will serve to educate the American people as to the dangers of unbridled public rage indiscriminately directed at a sector of our population. It is of course just as important that this commission publicly investigate our government's removal of the Aleuts from their homes in Alaska. That story must also be told.

I would extend a note of caution to those who would believe that the sole or primary purpose of this commission is to merely determine the extent to which some form of monetary restitution is to be provided to individuals by the government. The issue of transferring taxpayers' dollars in reparation to those interned is one over which there appears to be a split of opinion within the Japanese American community itself. Moreover several of the proposals in this regard which have been aired publicly have suggested an expenditure well into the billions of dollars. I feel compelled to state that Congress would have never chartered this commission if restitution were to be accepted by the commissioners as a foregone conclusion. The question of monetary recompense is rather just one issue- among many- to be considered. If it does develop that some form of restitution is fully warranted then I will consider such proposals on their merits.

In the spirit of honest inquiry, I would like to welcome the distinguished individuals who have assembled to testify before this commission and look forward to a fruitful series of public hearings on this important national and historical issue.

COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS



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Congressman Dan Lungren

Congressman Dan Lungren was appointed to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in January 1981 by the Speaker of the House. He was elected Vice-Chairman by a vote of the Commission members.

An active supporter of President Reagan during the 1980 Presidential campaign, Lungren is the only elected Republican office holder serving on the Commission.

A member of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and International Law of the House Judiciary Committee, Lungren is the chief House sponsor of the U.S.-Mexico Good Neighbor Employment Act, a "Guest Worker" proposal which sets firm guidelines for alien employment.

Lungren represents the 34th district of California which contains portions of Los Angeles and Orange counties. A native of Long Beach, he was first elected to Congress in 1978 and re-elected in 1980 with 72% of the vote.

REPUBLICAN