

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
October 16, 2003

Senate Judiciary Committee
Executive Business Meeting

Mark-Up of the Wartime Treatment Study Act (S. 1691)

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased that the Committee today will consider the Wartime Treatment Study Act. I want to thank my colleagues Senators Grassley and Kennedy for their support of this important legislation. Senator Grassley worked closely with me in drafting this bill before we first introduced it last Congress. I very much appreciate his contributions and continued support.

Mr. Chairman, the Committee favorably reported this bill with a substitute amendment last Congress. Therefore, the bill that is before the Committee today is the final version of the bill that this Committee already reviewed and approved last year.

The Wartime Treatment Study Act would simply create two independent, fact-finding commissions - one commission to review the treatment by the U.S. government of German Americans, Italian Americans and other European Americans and European Latin Americans during World War II, and a second commission to review the government's treatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution who were turned away at our borders.

As my colleagues know, during World War II, the United States fought the spread of Nazism and fascism. Nazi Germany was engaged in the horrific persecution and genocide of Jews. By the end of the war, six million Jews had perished at the hands of Nazi Germany.

Unfortunately, while we were at war with Germany, Italy, and Japan, the United States, here at home, treated as suspect the Japanese American, German American, and Italian American communities, depriving them of fundamental rights of liberty and due process. During World War II, the U.S. government designated more than 600,000 Italian born and 300,000 German born U.S. resident aliens and their families as "enemy aliens." Thousands of German Americans, Italian Americans, and Eastern European Americans were unfairly arrested, detained, interned, or relocated. Our government confiscated the personal property of many European Americans and restricted their travel rights.

Pursuant to a policy coordinated with Latin American nations, our government also transferred European Latin Americans, including German and Austrian Jews, to the U.S. and detained them, or, in some cases, deported them to hostile Axis nations.

Another tragic episode in our country's history, Mr. Chairman, was the treatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution and genocide in the years before and during World War II. German and Austrian Jews applied for visas, but the United States severely limited their entry due to strict immigration policies,

policies that many believe were motivated by fear that our enemies would send spies under the guise of refugees and by the widespread anti-foreigner and anti-Semitic attitudes that pervaded American public opinion at that time.

As a nation, we have been slow to study and acknowledge our government's conduct during World War II. Most Americans are now aware of the U.S. government's treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Through the work of a commission created by Congress in 1980, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, this tragic episode in American history finally received the official acknowledgment and condemnation it deserved.

But thus far, there has not been sufficient official study and acknowledgment of the injustices suffered by German Americans, Italian Americans, and other Americans of European descent during World War II, as well as the treatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution and genocide.

My bill would create two independent, fact-finding commissions. The Commission on Wartime Treatment of European Americans would review the facts and circumstances surrounding the U.S. government's treatment of German Americans, Italian Americans, and other European Americans, as well as European Latin Americans, during World War II. A second commission, the Commission on Wartime Treatment of Jewish Refugees, would review the facts and circumstances surrounding the U.S. government's treatment of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution and genocide.

These commissions are needed so that Americans can be fully informed about how their government acted and can work to ensure that these activities never happen again.

Mr. Chairman, the Allied victory in the Second World War was an American triumph, a triumph for freedom, justice, and human rights. The courage displayed by so many Americans should be a source of great pride for us all. But while we should be proud of our nation's triumph, we should not let that justifiable pride blind us to the treatment of some Americans by their own government. It is time for a full accounting of this chapter in our nation's history.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your support in placing this bill on the agenda and allowing its consideration. It is past time for Congress to act. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.