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Resolution commemorates internment of Japanese Americans *SCR 14 sets Feb. 19 as national Day of Remembrance in Oregon*

SALEM – The tragic internment of Japanese Americans during World War II took a profound toll on 120,000 people on the West Coast – including 4,000 Oregonians – and the Oregon Senate is making sure that injustice is not forgotten.

Today the Oregon Senate voted 29-0 to pass Senate Concurrent Resolution 14, which acknowledges the 75th anniversary of Japanese American internment during World War II and recognizes Feb. 19 as the national Day of Remembrance of those events. In addition, the resolution honors Japanese American World War II veterans and internees.

“It seemed really important for us as a Legislature to recognize what happened back in World War II, and it feels especially pertinent based on all the debate that’s going on in our country right now,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who co-carried the resolution on the Senate floor. “People’s lives were devastated. If we don’t learn from history, why do we learn anything?”

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order authorizing the United States military to designate specified “military areas” and excluding certain individuals from those areas. A month later, Roosevelt issued another executive order establishing the War Relocation Authority and authorizing the director to create and execute a program to remove, relocate and supervise certain people. As a result, between 1942 and 1945, about 120,000 Japanese Americans and legal resident aliens residing on the West Coast – including 4,000 Oregonians of Japanese ancestry – were relocated and placed into internment camps.

Though Roosevelt suspended the executive order in 1944, and World War II concluded in 1945, the last internment camp – located in Tule Lake, Calif. – did not close until 1946. The internment order finally was rescinded formally by President Gerald Ford 30 years later in 1976. Ford at that time called upon Americans to “resolve that this kind of action shall never again be repeated” and signed legislation establishing the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The commission’s study, issued in 1982, determined that relocating and interning Japanese Americans was not justified.

Across the country, Japanese Americans observe Feb. 19 as a Day of Remembrance regarding the internment Japanese Americans endured during World War II, and also as an opportunity to educate the public about the incarceration in hope that nothing like it happens again.

“This bill was being worked on even before the recent executive orders that have been issued, but it is always pertinent to remember the past and how it shapes our actions in the present,” said Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham), who was a chief sponsor. “The internments and what our government did – singling out one group of Americans and confining them – was absolutely atrocious and this type of behavior must never happen again. We need to remember the past so we can create a better future.”

The resolution now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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