

REP. JOE NEGUSE
MEMBER TESTIMONY
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES LEGISLATIVE HEARING
APRIL 21, 2021

BACKGROUND

Thank you, Chair Grijalva. I am honored today to speak about H.R. 2497, the “Amache [uh-mah-chee] National Historic Site Act,” a special piece of bipartisan legislation that would designate the Amache incarceration site in southeast Colorado as a National Historic Site.

During the first months of World War II, the United States initiated the single largest forced imprisonment in its history.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order, forcing more than 120,000 people, primarily of Japanese descent, to relocate to 10 remote, military-style prisons.

The Granada Relocation Center in the southeast corner of Colorado, known as Amache, was one of these 10 incarceration centers.

Two-thirds of the people at Amache were American citizens.

Most had never been to Japan.

Many others were first-generation Japanese elders who had immigrated from Japan and were denied U.S. citizenship for decades.

Most were given a week or less to dispose of everything they owned, with no idea where they were going or what would happen.

The unjustifiable internment of Japanese Americans is no doubt one of the darkest scars in our country’s history. It is also a deeply personal history for Colorado.

SIGNIFICANCE

While Amache no longer holds prisoners, anti-Asian rhetoric continues in the United States. The recent surge in anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination is deeply troubling.

As we work to address it, it's critical we remember our nation's history, so we may honor, educate and heal.

Designation of Amache as a National Historical Site will provide education for future generations on this shameful time in our nation's history, as well as healing and honor to those that lived it.

The landscapes, cultural places, and stories we chose to protect reflect our values as a nation. The story of Amache is important.

BOB FUCHIGAMI

The committee is honored to be joined today by someone who can share that story so personally.

Bob Fuchigami [Foo-chi-gah-mee], was just 11 when his family was ordered to leave their home in less than one week with no explanation of their destination. He would spend three years wrongfully imprisoned with no hearing or trial.

And yet, Bob went on to serve his country in the military. And he continues to give back by leading the effort to protect the history of Amache.

I am so grateful for his willingness to speak about a traumatic and painful experience for the benefit of the American people.

His story, like many others, is told through the preservation of this site.

Bob is an American. He is a Navy veteran. Like myself, he is the son of immigrants. I am lucky to call someone so incredible a constituent.

SUPPORT

I am proud the *Amache National Historic Site Act* is a bipartisan piece of legislation, and I am thankful for Representative Ken Buck's partnership on this bill.

I am also grateful to the Amache Preservation Society and the Granada High School Students who, along with the support of other organizations, currently maintain the physical site of Amache.

They have renovated the cemetery, established an Amache Museum and research center, restored key landmarks, including the water tower, a guard tower and a barrack. Their work has been so important, and this bill would not be possible without their investment in protecting the site.

The bill enjoys local support from a variety of groups including:

- the Town of Granada;
- The Amache Preserve Society;
- The Mile High Japanese American Citizens League;
- The Anti-Defamation League Mountain States Region;
- Canyons & Plains of Southeast Colorado;
- National Parks Conservation Association;
- History Colorado; and
- The Japan-America Society of Southern Colorado

CLOSING

Amache tells an important story.

I stand ready to make sure the story is protected and shared for many generations.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2497 and help us get this done.