

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5401

The Honorable Pedro R. Pierluisi
Floor Speech in Support of H.R. 44, the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act
February 23, 2009

Mr. Speaker:

I rise in strong support of H.R. 44.

I want to begin by commending the gentlelady from Guam, Ms. Bordallo, who has worked tirelessly for years to steer this important bill through the legislative process. Ms. Bordallo's legislation was approved by the House in 2007, but was not taken up by the Senate. I believe that passage of her bill is long overdue. And I respectfully urge my colleagues in both chambers to support it.

H.R. 44 will acknowledge the courageous loyalty shown by the U.S. nationals of Guam during the Japanese occupation in World War II. Chairman Rahall, in remarks delivered several years ago, summarized life in occupied Guam in stark terms:

For more than two and a half years, brutal atrocities were committed against the people of Guam. The horrific acts of public beheadings, beatings, and rapes were burned into the memories of parents and children. In an island community of 22,000, everyone knew one another and so no one escaped the tragedies of wartime occupation.

Mr. Speaker: This bill is more than a symbolic gesture. It reflects the view that solemn speeches about sacrifice and loyalty are nice, and they are necessary, but they are not enough. This legislation embodies the determination of a grateful nation to move beyond rhetoric and to provide tangible assistance to a relatively small universe of U.S. citizens whose bravery and suffering have yet to be adequately addressed. Ms. Bordallo's bill would authorize the federal government to pay compensation to two categories of persons. First: to living Guam residents who were seriously injured or interned during the occupation. And second: to the surviving family members of those Guam residents who were killed or seriously injured in the course of the occupation. The eligibility criteria established by the bill are fair and transparent. And the amount of compensation prescribed is reasonable.

Mr. Speaker: H.R. 44 would essentially implement the recommendations of the Guam War Claims Review Commission, which was established by Congress. The Review Commission submitted its final report in June 2004. The report concluded that the war claims process created in 1945 to compensate the people of Guam was deficient in key respects. The Commission observed that many residents of Guam missed the window in which to file claims—as a result of language barriers, high illiteracy rates, and the lack of newspapers and telephones on the Island. Furthermore, the Commission identified inequalities with respect to both the types of claims that were permitted and the amount of compensation that was paid. The Commission recommended that the United States provide additional compensation to the two categories of claimants I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Speaker: It is likely that more pages have been written about World War II and its aftermath than any other subject. Today, we have an opportunity to write an important new chapter about an aspect of the conflict that has not received the attention it deserves. I am proud to join Ms. Bordallo in what is clearly a sacred mission for her and the good people of Guam—and in what ought to be viewed as a worthy endeavor by all Americans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.