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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

“A Tribute to Asian Pacific American Heritage Month”

Mrs. FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the millions of Americans of Asian and Pacific heritage for their significant contributions and service to strengthen this great nation, and to join the Nation in celebrating Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

First I would like to take this opportunity to recall the pioneers of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Through their vision and leadership, Frank Horton, Norman Y. Mineta, Daniel Inouye, and Spark Matsunaga successfully empowered Asian and Pacific Islander Americans by establishing a period of celebration that recognized the many contributions Asian and Pacific Islanders have made for over a century.

They chose May to commemorate Asian Pacific Heritage Month because that is when the first Japanese immigrants came to the United States in 1843. It is also the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

This year's theme for Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, “Liberty and Freedom for All,” honors the remarkable accomplishments Asians and Pacific Islanders from all walks of life have made to their communities.

I want to pay particular tribute to the thousands of Asian Americans serving in our armed forces and thank them for their invaluable service for defending our country and securing freedom abroad.

The Asian American tradition of U.S. military service can be traced back as far as the War of 1812, and our country is grateful for the military service of more than 300,000 Asian Pacific American veterans.

We are particularly indebted to the famous “Go for Broke” 442nd regimental combat team of Japanese American soldiers of World War II. The 442nd regiment was the most highly decorated unit in American military history--with more than 21 Medal of Honor winners, including my dear colleague, U.S. Senator Inouye.

In spite of the discrimination and racism of those tumultuous times, these Asian American service members performed above and beyond the call of duty.

I also want to take a moment and honor the memory of one of the Asian American community's greatest political leaders and a trusted colleague of mine, U.S. Representative Robert Matsui.

As a youth, Bob Matsui and his family were interned at Tule Lake Camp for more than three years during World War II, but Bob overcame these challenges to go on and pursue a distinguished career in public service.

One of Bob's most significant legacies was his work prompting the U.S. government to make amends with Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II. It was due to Bob's dedication and perseverance that the U.S. government finally issued a formal apology for the Japanese-American internment program and also provided due compensation to the victims of this policy.

In tribute to his outstanding achievements, Senator Boxer and I helped name the Federal Courthouse in Bob's hometown of Sacramento in his honor. His work and his legacy will be fondly remembered and he serves as a shining example of the extraordinary achievements of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

This year, the Asian American community also saw the passing of the civil rights leader, Fred Korematsu. Mr. Korematsu's defiance of the ill-conceived Japanese internment policy during World War II was an incredibly courageous act. His challenge of the Japanese internment policy made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, the highest court in the land. In recognition of his courageous actions, President Clinton awarded Mr. Korematsu the highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in 1998.

Mr. Korematsu and Bob Matsui are testaments to the remarkable display of courage, will, and determination of millions of Asian Americans to succeed in our country despite personal hardships and at times, discrimination.

Currently, Asian Pacific Islander Americans constitute one of the fastest growing minority communities in the United States, and I am proud to recognize the State of California as home to the greatest number of Asian Pacific Islander Americans. There are over 13 million Asian Pacific Islander Americans in the nation with

more than 4.5 million living in California.

With this wealth of Asian American diversity, our State is enriched by many famous ethnic enclaves such as San Francisco's Chinatown, Westminster's Little Saigon, and the City of Artesia's Little India. In fact, the second largest populations of Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese in the world are located in California.

In this Congressional Session, I am hoping to help preserve some of the unique Asian American immigration history in my State. Senator Boxer and I have introduced legislation to help provide federal funding for the Angel Island Immigration Station, known as the "Ellis Island of the West."

The Angel Island Immigration Station, a National Historic Landmark, was the entry point for over 1 million immigrants from 1910-1940, including approximately 175,000 Chinese immigrants. Angel Island is a precious part of our nation's history and tells the story of many people who came to America to make a better life for their families.

As we join the nation in celebrating the rich and diverse Asian and Pacific Island cultures during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, we are not only recognizing many notable achievements, but we are also reminded of the struggles and sacrifices endured to live and experience the American dream.

Mr. President, I am pleased to take this time today to honor the distinguished accomplishments of Asian Pacific Americans during this year's Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.