



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

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JACL Response to Jason Chaffetz’s proposal for “prison camps” for undocumented immigrants

As the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) strongly disagrees with Jason Chaffetz, who proposed the construction of “prison camps” surrounded by barbed wire to confine undocumented immigrants.

The JACL has advocated for a policy of comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship for the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants living and working in our country so that they can emerge from the shadows and legalize their status. While the JACL does not condone violations of law, we do understand the plight of undocumented immigrants who come to our country to avoid economic and political hardships. This policy, in its enforcement, must be humane where individuals are treated properly.

Chaffetz has taken issue with criticism of his proposal by stating that his plan has nothing to do with targeting ethnicity notwithstanding studies suggesting the great preponderance of undocumented immigrants are identifiable minorities. Thus, the JACL would renew the concern that we avoid the specter of camps similar to the Topaz concentration camp near the town of Delta, Utah, where approximately 8,000 Japanese Americans were imprisoned during World War II.

Floyd Mori, National Executive Director of the JACL, who was born of immigrant parents, raised and educated in Utah stated, “Mr. Chaffetz has fumbled the ball on the important issue of immigration and turned it into an engine of fear towards immigrants. The spirit of immigrants was the key to the growth and development of the State of Utah and the Nation. Mormon and Asian immigrant pioneers tilled the soil and laid the infrastructure for this great state. The notion that modern day immigrants are less important raises the specter of exclusionism and economic and historical ignorance.”

Finally, the JACL would caution against inflating the emotional rhetoric surrounding the issue of immigration. Meaningful and comprehensive reform is needed in our immigration policy, which isn’t enhanced by extreme proposals reminiscent of a dark episode in our past.

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