

INTRODUCTION OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST ASSETS COMMISSION EXTENSION ACT OF 1999

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President and Members of the Senate, next week our Nation will pass an important but unnoticed anniversary—the anniversary of one of the first official notifications we were given of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

On August 8, 1942, Dr. Gerhart Reigner, the World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva, sent a cable to both Rabbi Stephen Wise—the President of the World Jewish Congress—and a British Member of Parliament. In it, Dr. Reigner wrote about “an alarming report” that Hitler was planning that all Jews in countries occupied or controlled by Germany “should after deportation and concentration * * * be exterminated at one blow to resolve once and for all the Jewish question in Europe.” Our Government’s reaction to this news was not our greatest moment during that terrible era.

First, the State Department refused to give the cable to Rabbi Wise. After Rabbi Wise got a copy of the cable from the British, he passed it along to the Undersecretary of State, who asked him not to make the contents public until it could be confirmed. Rabbi Wise didn’t make it public, but he did tell President Roosevelt, members of the cabinet, and Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter about the cable. None of them chose to act publicly on its contents.

Our government finally did acknowledge the report some months later, but the question remains: how many lives could have been saved had we responded to this clear warning of the Holocaust earlier and with more vigor? The questions of how the United States responded to the Holocaust and, specifically, what was the fate of the Holocaust victims’ assets that came into the possession or control of the United States government, is the focus of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, of which I am a member.

This bipartisan Commission—chaired by Edgar M. Bronfman—is composed of 21 individuals, including four Senators, four Members of the House, representatives of the Departments of the Army, Justice, State, and Treasury, the Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, and eight private citizens.

The Commission is charged with conducting original research into what happened to the assets of Holocaust victims—including gold, other financial instruments and art and cultural objects—that passed into the possession or control of the Federal government, including the Federal Reserve. We are also to survey the research done by others about what happened to the assets of Holocaust victims that passed into non-Federal hands, including State governments, and report to the President, making recommendations for future actions, whether legislative or administrative.

The Commission was created last year by a unanimous Act of Congress, and has been hard at work since early this year. Perhaps the most important information that the Commission’s preliminary research has uncovered is the fact that the question of the extent to which assets of Holocaust victims fell into Federal hands is much, much larger than we thought even a year ago, when we first established this Commission.

Last month, at the quarterly meeting of the Commissioners in Washington, we unveiled a “map” of Federal and related offices through which these assets may have flowed. To everyone’s surprise, taking a sample year—1943—we found more than 75 separate entities that may have been involved.

The records of each of these offices must first be located and then scoured—page by page—at the National Archives and other record centers across the United States. In total, we must look at tens of millions of pages to complete the historical record of this period.

Furthermore, to our nation’s credit, we are currently declassifying millions of pages of World War II-era information that may shine light on our government’s policies and procedures during that time. But, this salutary effort dramatically increases the work the Commission must do to fulfill the mandate we have given it.

In addition, as the Commission pursues its research, it is discovering new aspects of the story of Holocaust assets that hadn’t previously been understood. The Commission’s research may be unearthing an alarming trend to import into the United States through South America, art and other possessions looted from Holocaust victims. Pursuing these leads will require the review of additional thousands of documents.

The Commission is also finding aspects of previously known incidents that have not been carefully or credibly researched. The ultimate fate of the so-called “Hungarian Gold Trains”—for example—a set of trains containing the art, gold, and other valuables of Hungarian victims of the Nazis that was detained by the liberating US Army during their dash for Berlin has not been carefully investigated.

In another area of our research, investigators are seeking to piece together the puzzle of foreign-owned intellectual property—some of which may have been owned by victims of Nazi genocide—the rights to which were vested in the Federal government under wartime law.

For all of these reasons and more, I am introducing today with Senators BOXER, DODD and GRAMS the “U.S. Holocaust Assets Commission Extension Act of 1999.” This simple piece of legislation moves to December, 2000, the date of the final report of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, giv-

ing our investigators the time to do a professional and credible job on the tasks the congress has assigned to them.

This bill also authorizes additional appropriations for the Commission to complete its work. I strongly urge all of my colleagues to join me in support of this necessary and simple of legislation.

As we approach the end of the millennium, the United States is without a doubt the strongest nation on the face of the earth. Our strength, however, is not limited to our military and economic might. Our nation is strong because we have the resolve to look at ourselves and our history honestly and carefully—even if the truth we find shows us in a less-than flattering light.

The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States is seeking the truth about the belongings of Holocaust victims that came into the possession or control of the United States government. All of my colleagues should support this endeavor, and we must give the Commission the time and support it needs by supporting the U.S. Holocaust Assets Commission Extension Act of 1999.

TRIBUTE TO ARMY SPECIALIST T. BRUCE CLUFF

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Army Specialist T. Bruce Cluff of Washington, Utah. Specialist Cluff was one of five American soldiers from the 204th Military Intelligence Battalion stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, who perished when their U.S. Army surveillance plane crashed in the rugged mountains of Colombia while conducting a routine counter narcotics mission in conjunction with the Colombian government.

I am deeply saddened by the loss of this fine young man while in the service of our country. This is a greater tragedy by the fact that Specialist Cluff leaves behind a wife, Meggin, and two young children, Maciah and Ryker, with another child yet to be born. My heart and my prayers go out to them as well as to their extended family.

I also acknowledge and extend my sympathies to the families of the other four American soldiers who perished in the crash. I especially hope that Meggin Cluff, her children, and the other families of these soldiers will feel the immense gratitude that we have for the sacrifice of their loved ones.

Indeed, Specialist T. Bruce Cluff and his crew mates are heroes, as are all of the men and women of our armed forces who everyday unselfishly put life and limb at risk to defend our great nation. Specialist Cluff and his Army unit were engaged in a different type of war. Illegal drug trafficking has become the scourge of our society, and we are determined to stop this practice at its very roots.

The men and women of our armed forces assisting in these offshore interdiction efforts will not be deterred by