

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Visitor Center Opening

Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial

October 11, 2026

[[VIDEO](#)]

Sen. Cantwell: Well, good afternoon, and I want to thank everybody for this great, great Northwest turnout for such an important date. It's an honor to join you in commemorating the opening of the new Bainbridge Island [Japanese] American Memorial Visitor Center, a new addition to our national historic site, which is part of our National Park Service, to tell a story Americans should never forget.

We're here today to acknowledge the significance of the very ground that we stand on, and the role it plays in American history – a difficult and shameful chapter, but that is exactly why this site is so important.

It serves to acknowledge and memorialize the wrongs committed here in the name of national security, and to help educate future generations. It will stand as an enduring symbol of what should never happen again.

So I want to express my hearty appreciation for everyone who's worked on this over the many, many years. First of all, to the survivors and their families who join us here today: thank you. Thank you for your work. Thank you for your persistence.

I also want to thank Ellen Sato – and the leadership that you can just see is demonstrated every minute that she's here – [and] to [thank] your board and your staff who brought all of us together, [and] the many organizations from around our state: the Bainbridge Island Japanese American [Ex]clusion Memorial Association, Densho [and the] Wing Luke Museum, the Japanese American Citizens League, the Friends of Minidoka, and Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, [and] the National Park Service.

I also want to give a shout out to Dan Sakura, one of my former staff members, who's also played a very important role in the continuation here and at Minidoka. I also want to thank Clarence Moriwaki, Mayor of [the City of] Bainbridge Island, for his continued leadership.

Charles Beall, the Superintendent of the [Seattle Area] National Park Sites, [and] David Harry, [former] Superintendent of the Bainbridge Island Metropolitan Parks and Recreation District – you have all made a tremendous contribution to today. John Paul Jones definitely loved the architecture. Thank you very much.

On this very site, [on] March 30th, 1942, American citizens of Japanese descent were stripped of their civil liberties, stripped of their property, [and] stripped of their community and their freedoms, based on nothing more than their heritage and appearance. It [was] a clear violation of their constitutional rights and our values as Americans.

Bainbridge Island had the dubious distinction, in addition, to being the first exclusion in the country. Overall, 12,000 residents from our state suffered this injustice, and nationwide, approximately 110,000 were forcibly removed to war relocation camps.

Despite being interned and discriminated against, many Japanese Americans served in the armed forces during the war. For example, at Minidoka Internment Camp, with internees mainly from the Seattle and Portland area, nearly 1,300 Nisei, basically out of the camp's total population of 9,000, volunteered to serve our country in World War II.

Some of them, like William Nakamura – honored today with the designation and naming of the federal courthouse in Seattle – gave their lives. All of them served with honor and had to defend our nation, even though it had failed them and their families. My dear friend and former colleague, Senator Daniel Inouye, was one of them.

It was not until 1988 did Congress pass and the President sign legislation that issued a formal apology to those interred and those who had survived. So the importance of this site has never been greater than today.

We see the same injustices being implied in immigration policy and federal policies that target and exclude based on heritage and appearance. So, today's visit center and the exhibition will remind all of us that exclusion is wrong. It will explain what happened here and commit to never letting it happen again.

I'm proud to have worked with this coalition [and] the [National] Park Service in the 2008 legislation to establish Minidoka as a national historic site, and obviously the connection to this site, which, by the way, I think [the] Minidoka National Historic Site just itself in the National Park System, the Minidoka site, has had over 40,000 visitors in 2025. So these two things being connected are of great significance to our nation.

I know that you've mentioned some of my other colleagues. Senator Murray also played a great role. [And with Representative] Kilmer, we were able to secure \$767,000 in federal funding to complete the amazing center, and it will provide these interpretations additional space, better education, film screening[s], and the connective story between these two places.

So today, this physical place make[s] sure that this story is never forgotten, and will also make sure it never happens again. It will shine a light on a dark moment, and one of the best ways to make sure it never does happen again. Thank you.