

DOCUMENT 1

Excerpts from Harry S. Truman's statement upon signing the Displaced Persons Act, June 25, 1948.

1.

"It is with very great reluctance that I have signed S. 2242, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.

If the Congress were still in session, I would return this bill without my approval and urge that a fairer, more humane bill be passed. In its present form this bill is flagrantly discriminatory. It mocks the American tradition of fair play.

Unfortunately, it was not passed until the last day of the session. If I refused to sign this bill now, there would be no legislation on behalf of displaced persons until the next session of the Congress.

It is a close question whether this bill is better or worse than no bill at all. After careful consideration I have decided, however, that it would not be right to penalize the beneficiaries of this bill on account of the injustices perpetrated against others who should have been included within its provisions. I have therefore signed the bill in the hope that its injustices will be rectified by the Congress at the first opportunity"

2.

"I have analyzed closely the bill which was sent to me for signature. Its good points can be stated all too briefly: At long last, the principle is recognized that displaced persons should be admitted to the United States. Two hundred thousand displaced persons may be admitted in the next 2 years, as well as 2,000 recent Czech refugees and 3,000 orphans.

The bad points of the bill are numerous. Together they form a pattern of discrimination and intolerance wholly inconsistent with the American sense of justice.

The bill discriminates in callous fashion against displaced persons of the Jewish faith. This brutal fact cannot be obscured by the maze of technicalities in the bill or by the protestations of some of its sponsors.

The primary device used to discriminate against Jewish displaced persons is the provision restricting eligibility to those displaced persons who entered Germany, Austria, or Italy on or before December 22, 1945. Most of the Jewish displaced persons who had entered Germany, Austria, or Italy by that time have already left; and most of the Jewish displaced persons now in those areas arrived there after December 22, 1945, and hence are denied a chance to come to the United States under this bill. By this device more than 90 percent of the remaining Jewish

displaced persons are definitely excluded. Even the eligible 10 percent are beset by numerous additional restrictions written into the bill.

For all practical purposes, it must be frankly recognized, therefore, that this bill excludes Jewish displaced persons, rather than accepting a fair proportion of them along with other faiths."

3.

"The bill also excludes many displaced persons of the Catholic faith who deserve admission. Many anti-Communist refugees of Catholic faith fled into the American zones after December 22, 1945, in order to escape persecution in countries dominated by a Communist form of government. These too are barred by the December 22, 1945, dateline.

It is inexplicable, except upon the abhorrent ground of intolerance, that this date should have been chosen instead of April 21, 1947, the date on which General Clay closed the displaced persons camps to further admissions.

The Jewish and Catholic displaced persons who found asylum in our zones between December 22, 1945, and April 21, 1947, who are wrongly excluded by this bill, fled their native countries for the same basic reasons as Balts who came before December 22, 1945, and Czechs who came after January, 1948, who are rightly included. I sincerely hope that the Congress will remedy this gross discrimination at its earliest opportunity."

4.

"The bill reflects a singular lack of confidence by the Congress in the capacity and willingness of the people of the United States to extend a welcoming hand to the prospective immigrants. It contains many restrictive requirements, such as prior assurances of suitable employment and "safe and sanitary housing," unnecessarily complicated investigation of each applicant, and burdensome reports from individual immigrants."

5.

"I have signed this bill, in spite of its many defects, in order not to delay further the beginning of a resettlement program and in the expectation that the necessary remedial action will follow when the Congress reconvenes."

Citation: Harry S. Truman: "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Displaced Persons Act," June 25, 1948. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12942>

DOCUMENT 2

IT IS with very great pleasure that I have today signed H.R. 4567, which amends the **Displaced Persons** Act of 1948.

The improvements embodied in H.R. 4567 now bring the American principles of fair play and generosity to our displaced persons program.

When I reluctantly signed the **Displaced Persons** Act of 1948, I did so in spite of certain of its provisions which imposed unworkable restrictions and resulted in unfair discriminations. Nevertheless, I felt it was necessary to make a start toward a resettlement program for these victims of totalitarianism who yearned to live as useful citizens in a free country.

I had no doubt then, and I have been confident ever since, that when the will of the American people was truly expressed, these defects in the program would be corrected. This confidence has been fully justified.

H.R. 4567 corrects the discriminations inherent in the previous act. Now, the postwar victims of totalitarianism will be on an equal footing with earlier victims of Nazi aggression.

I am also glad that the new act wisely and generously extends opportunity for immigration to the United States to additional groups of deserving persons who should make fine citizens. Special provisions are made for 10,000 war orphans from the free countries of Europe and for 4,000 European refugees who fled to the Far East to escape one form of totalitarianism and must now flee before a new tyranny. Eighteen thousand honorably discharged veterans of the exiled Polish Army, who were given temporary homes in England after the war, will now have an opportunity to settle permanently in the United States. Ten thousand Greek refugees and 2,000 displaced persons now in Trieste and Italy will also have an opportunity to immigrate to the United States. Provision has been made for the admission into this country of 54,744 refugees and expellees of German origin. In all, the amended law authorizes a total of 400,744 visas, including the 172,230 which have been issued up to May 31, 1950.

It is especially gratifying to me that this expression of American fairness and generosity has been brought about by the combined efforts of both 'political parties, supported by groups and organizations broadly representative of all parts of our country. H.R. 4567 is a splendid example of the way in which joint action can strengthen and unify our country.

The countrymen of these displaced persons have brought to us in the past the best of their labor, their hatred of tyranny, and their love of freedom. They have helped our country grow in strength and moral leadership. I have every confidence that the new Americans who will come to our country under the provisions of the present bill will also make a substantial contribution to our national well-being.

I have today also signed the Executive order required by law, designating the **Displaced Persons** Commission to carry out the investigations and make the reports required by

the statute, regarding the character, history, and eligibility of displaced persons and persons of German ethnic origin seeking admission into the United States. In the discharge of this statutory duty, I am directing the Commission to continue its vigorous and effective protection of the security of the United States.

Citation: Harry S. Truman: "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Bill Amending the Displaced Persons Act., June 16, 1950. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American President Project*. www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13531

Read the excerpts from Document 1, discuss it with your group and answer the questions below.

1. In excerpt 1, Truman makes it clear that he is not happy with the bill, why does he decide to sign it when he has so many objections to it?

2. In excerpt 2, what does Truman see as a strong point to the bill?

3. How many DPs can be admitted under this bill? _____

4. What reason does Truman give as the date April 21, 1947 being a better choice for the deadline of DPs to have entered the camps?

From President Truman's Statement

1. What two documents is President Truman referring to? _____

2. What did Truman think H.R. 4567 corrected?

3. How many visas does the amended bill allow for? _____

4. In one or two sentences briefly describe what the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was.

5. In one or two sentences briefly describe why it was needed.
