



Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol 156

WASHINGTON, Monday, May 2, 2011

No. 168

Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein *In Celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month*

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, since 1978 we have set aside the month of May to honor Americans that are of Asian and Pacific Islander descent. Today I am pleased to join the celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and the many accomplishments and contributions of such an inspiring, spirited, and industrious group of people.

Efforts to establish an Asian Pacific American Heritage Month first took shape in 1977 when U.S. Representatives Frank Horton and Norman Y. Mineta introduced a resolution calling on the president to declare a weeklong commemoration. Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga followed suit in the Senate. Both resolutions were ultimately passed, and President Carter in 1978 officially designated a weeklong celebration to honor the first Japanese immigrants to the United States and the Chinese laborers who completed the Transcontinental Railroad.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush extended the event to a month-long celebration, and in 1992 the designation of May as Asian Pacific American Heritage Month was signed into law.

More than 17 million Asian Pacific Americans live in the United States today, with more than 5 million living in California. Together, these Americans represent more than 30 countries and ethnic groups and enhance the diversity that is a hallmark of our nation. Asian Pacific Americans enrich California through their famous and iconic communities including Chinatown in San Francisco; Filipino Town and Little Tokyo in Los Angeles; Little Cambodia in Long Beach; and Little Saigon in Westminster.

Asian Pacific Americans have also left a large imprint on the economy of the United States, although in this time of economic challenge, it is important that we offer as much support as possible to keep those businesses thriving. This is why I support the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, which is focused on increasing Asian Pacific American participation in areas such as commerce; labor and employment; and economic and community development. I am also a cosponsor of

legislation that will help create small businesses and improve small business owners' access to capital.

This year's theme, "Leadership to Meet the Challenge of a Changing World," is especially fitting given the many challenges we face today. The leadership of many Asian Pacific Americans who have dedicated their lives to public service is especially notable. These trailblazers have been a strong voice for the community and have empowered Asian Pacific Americans to break barriers and pursue the American Dream.

Among these respected Americans are my esteemed colleagues in Congress, Senators Daniel Inouye and Daniel Akaka, and nine members of the U.S. House of Representatives including California Representatives Judy Chu, Doris Matsui, and Mike Honda. In the executive branch, we're lucky to have the services of Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki.

In particular, I would like to recognize Rep. Chu on her new position as Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. I would also like to congratulate Secretary Locke on his recent nomination by President Obama to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the People's Republic of China. These individuals are all leaders in the Asian Pacific American community and their service inspires future generations to follow in their footsteps.

In addition to their cultures, entrepreneurial skills and dedication to public service, Asian Pacific Americans have also made great sacrifices to ensure our nation remains strong and secure. There are thousands of Asian Pacific Americans serving overseas in our armed forces, and here at home in our law enforcement agencies. These admirable citizens risk their lives every day to protect their communities. They deserve our thanks.

I also want to praise the leadership and hard work of the Asian Pacific American legal community. Since the beginning of 2009, we have made significant progress in our work to diversify federal courts. Six new Asian Pacific American judges have been confirmed to the federal bench. These include U.S. District Judges Jacqueline Nguyen and Dolly Gee in Los Angeles and U.S. District Judge Lucy Koh in San Jose. Two highly qualified nominees still await votes – Professor Goodwin Liu, nominated for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and U.S. Magistrate Judge Edward Chen, nominated for the U.S. District Court in San Francisco. I will continue to do what I can to further diversify the judiciary and ensure that qualified Asian Pacific American judges are nominated and confirmed to the federal bench.

Unfortunately, this month also brings with it the reminder that my good friend and political strategist Mr. Kam Kuwata is no longer with us. Kam was well-known and well-respected by those in California politics and journalism. He tirelessly pursued civil rights and achieved remarkable success in campaigns and state initiatives. He carried with him many of the difficulties Asian Pacific Americans have faced, as his mother's

family was interned during World War II. But he also embodied the many accomplishments that Asian Pacific Americans have achieved. Kam was truly one of the most intelligent and sharp people I have ever met. I would like to extend my heartfelt and deepest condolences to his family and friends. He will be dearly missed by all of us whose lives he touched.

Today, it is my honor to acknowledge the remarkable strength, character, and accomplishments of Asian Pacific Americans during Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.