

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Michael Honda (CA-15), chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) released the following statement today in celebration of Asian Pacific American (APA) Heritage Month, which takes place May of each year:

“This month we celebrate Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) and the many contributions our communities have made and will continue to make to our great country. There are 16.2 million AAPIs in the United States, making them one of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in our country.

“Despite the daunting challenges we face, this is a time of intense optimism and hope for the AAPI communities. This year we are marking Asian Pacific American Heritage Month under the twin banners of national service and economic recovery. Given the tumultuous economic time we find ourselves in, CAPAC is focusing on how our caucus and our communities can reach out to help fellow Americans devastated by the recession. We are at a pivotal moment in our nation’s history, where the national spirit is shifting to a new era of volunteerism, public service, and working for the common good. AAPI communities are no stranger to these changes, and we need to take hold of the new civic spirit engendered by the President Obama’s new administration.

“This year, we are marking APA Heritage Month with an American president with a strong understanding of Asia and AAPI communities. President Obama grew up in Hawaii and Indonesia, his sister is half Indonesian, and his brother-in-law is Chinese Canadian. President Obama’s campaign made unprecedented efforts to reach out to the AAPI communities, and we have found a receptive and engaged administration with a close ear to our policy concerns, including immigration and healthcare reform, minority outreach for the decennial census, and small business development.

“Many AAPIs have responded to President Obama’s call to public service, particularly in the current Administration. The President’s cabinet appointments include a historic number of three Asian Americans, each with outstanding public service records: Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki. Shinseki is

joined at Veterans Affairs by Tammy Duckworth, who serves as assistant secretary. This past month, CAPAC's own Victoria Tung transitioned from her position as CAPAC's executive director to an appointment under Secretary Locke at the Department of Commerce.

“The ranks of AAPI Members of Congress also increased this past year with the election of the first Vietnamese American in Congress, Rep. Anh ‘Joseph’ Cao from Louisiana’s second district, and the first Member of Congress representing the Northern Mariana Islands and the only Chamorro Member of the 111th Congress, Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan. These members are also new to CAPAC’s Executive Board. Rep. Steve Austria, representing Ohio’s seventh district, is half Filipino and also newly elected to Congress.

“For those of us in public service, it is heartening to see broadening civic participation across our communities. Each day, in our district offices and in the hallways of Congress, new faces are showing up looking to serve the common good and protect the public interest. We must do everything we can to harness this civic spirit and help guide our communities’ outstanding talents.

“As we continue our work in the 111th Congress, I look forward to working with my congressional colleagues to make sure that Asian American and Pacific Islander voices are heard in the most important and difficult policy debates of our time, including in the debates on immigration and healthcare reform. These voices must be heard because what makes us better policymakers, and stronger as a country is the diversity within all of our communities. Together, let us sustain a sense of renewed optimism amidst challenging times.”

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The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI

community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac> .