

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA) issued the following statement on the State of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community:

"As the nation reflects upon the State of the Union, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities must not be forgotten. There is much to be proud of. The Asian American and Pacific Islander community is the fastest growing and most diverse racial group in the United States. While our presence has traditionally been concentrated in a few states like California, New York, New Jersey, and Hawai'i, the population is rapidly growing in other states, such as Texas, Minnesota, Michigan and Nevada, with 48 ethnic groups among our ranks. As a diverse community, we have made tremendous economic, political, and social contributions to the United States. Politically, this year, Hawai'i elected the newest Member of Congress of Asian descent, Rep. Mazie Hirono, who is also the newest member of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

### **Economy**

"AAPIs contribute immensely to the U.S. economy. AAPI-owned businesses grew 180 percent between 1987 and 1997. Despite our successes, AAPI communities are in need of greater resources and attention from the Administration and Congress. Like many other communities, our families have been hit hard by the dire state of the economy. Homeownership rates of AAPIs continue to lag behind the national average of 66.2 percent. Among Asian Americans, 53.2 percent live in owner-occupied housing; among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders the figure is even lower, at 45.5 percent. The use of subprime loans among Asian Americans grew by 181 percent from 2004 to 2005. As a result many borrowers are placed in risky mortgage products that do not reflect their risk.

### **Education**

"To strengthen our economy, we need to invest in long-term solutions such as education. For Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, it may be tempting to assume that all of our students are faring well in school. The picture looks very different when we take a real look at our diverse community. While the AAPI community as a whole has a higher rate of individuals holding a bachelor's degree (BA), (i.e. 38% compared to 21% of the general population), Southeast Asians have significantly lower percentages of individuals holding a BA. Only 17% of Vietnamese Americans, 7% of Laotian Americans, 6% of Cambodian Americans, and 3% of Hmong Americans hold BAs.

"English Language Learners (ELLs) face some of the toughest challenges among AAPI students, yet they are largely underserved. ELLs are often not given enough time to develop English-language proficiency before being required to take the same assessments as their native English-speaking peers, and schools do not often provide adequate transitional bilingual education or supplemental services to ELLs. We must ensure that ELLs have access to adequate services to help them achieve the same level of success of their native English-speaking peers.

"If we do not dispel the myth that all of our students are doing well in school, we will miss the opportunity to fully engage these students, who have so much potential to contribute to our communities. One major problem is that lack of disaggregated data of school performance for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. I will continue to fight hard to ensure that accurate data is available for our community, one of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in the nation.

### **Healthcare**

"There are many health disparities that still exist among our communities. At least 17.7% of Asian Americans and 21.8% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders do not have health insurance compared to 11.2% of non-Hispanic whites. This represents a total of 2.3 million AAPIs who are without health care coverage. Studies show that as many as 54% of Korean American, and 32% of Vietnamese American adults, age 18-64, are uninsured, compared to 15% of the total population. AAPIs are also less likely than white Americans to have job-based health insurance coverage. Additionally, AAPI women have the lowest rate of cancer screening compared to other ethnic groups and AAPIs make up over half of the cases of chronic Hepatitis

B. CAPAC along with our Tri-Caucus partners have introduced the Health Equity and Accountability Act that would bring us closer to closing the racial and ethnic disparities in our communities.

## Language Access

"I have heard many stories of failed access to services because of language issues. 24.7% of the AAPI population is linguistically isolated. When disaggregated, the percentages are even greater in the Southeast Asian community: 45% of Vietnamese Americans, 31.8% of Cambodian and Laotian Americans, and 35.1% of Hmong Americans are linguistically isolated. Patients with limited English proficiency are less likely to understand explanations of medical procedures, medication instructions, and less likely to receive needed financial assistance for health care. A Hmong man had the wrong leg amputated because there were no interpreters available. Vietnamese shrimpers were left behind when they needed critical emergency assistance after Katrina and Rita hit. Language access pervades all public arenas including voting rights, education, and other government services. We need to do more to integrate newcomers into our communities. That is why I will be introducing legislation in the spring that will help individuals and families learn English and will support community-driven integration initiatives.

## Immigration

"On the immigration front, we must enact true comprehensive immigration reform to fix our broken immigration system. Two million in our communities are waiting to be reconnected with family members, stuck in decades-long immigration backlogs. Those working hard in the shadows of American society without documentation include 1.5 million Asians. We must also restore due process, fairness, and respect for civil liberties in the immigration system. "Recently, the Administration entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Vietnamese government that will lead to the repatriation of thousands of Vietnamese. I am very concerned that the agreement was entered into without accounting for potential political persecution of those deported when they return to Vietnam. I will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that human rights concerns are at the forefront.

## **Military**

"With respect to the military, there are 62,378 AAPIs who are on active duty in the military, disproportionately constituting 4.5% of those on active duty. There are also 7,904 AAPIs who are currently deployed in the global war on terrorism. Active duty members are also disproportionately racial minorities. 35.9%, or 492,735, of active duty members identify themselves as racial minorities. We must ensure that our brave men and women in uniform have the resources they need to do their jobs. At the same time, our country needs a new direction in Iraq in order to bring our troops home as soon as possible.

## **Filipino Veterans**

"Furthermore, we have an obligation to uphold our promises to those who have valiantly served in our nation's military. During World War II, more than 200,000 Filipino soldiers served alongside U.S. troops, making vital contributions to the defeat of Japan. The American government promised that all Filipino soldiers who fought under the Stars and Stripes would be treated as American veterans with full benefits. In 1946, in one of its least decorous acts, Congress rescinded this promise. The time has come to recognize Filipino soldiers as full U.S. veterans, making this aging population eligible for U.S. veterans' benefits, including access to quality medical care at Veterans Affairs facilities.

## **Conclusion**

"As Chair of CAPAC, I urge this Administration and Members of the 110th Congress to make these issues a priority. I will work with other Members of Congress, particularly with Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Congressional Black Caucus, to keep the American Dream of equal opportunity alive. I also welcome President Bush's call for bipartisan efforts and hope that the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders will work with us to address these issues."

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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> .*