

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Michael Honda (CA-15), Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) released the following statement today in celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, which begins on Tuesday, May 1:

"Our country first recognized Asian Pacific American (APA) Heritage Month in 1977, thanks to the efforts of Representatives Norman Mineta and Frank Horton, and Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga. Now an annual event, the month of May gives both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and non-Asians around the nation a chance to celebrate and embrace the Asian and Pacific Islander culture.

"The first AAPI settlement in this country dates to 1763, when Filipinos escaped imprisonment aboard Spanish galleons and established a community near New Orleans. Chinese and Japanese immigrants likewise started communities in Hawai'i and California, where they sought labor and agricultural opportunities.

"From the time of these first settlements, AAPIs have experienced dual currents of discrimination and assimilation. In the difficult times, Asians were singled out for persecution by such acts as the Exclusion Laws of 1882 and 1924, and the Alien Land Act of 1913, which prohibited AAPI property ownership.

"From the legal fight against internment, championed by Fred Korematsu, to the efforts in response to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, to the current fight for full benefits for the thousands of Filipinos who fought for our country during WWII, the national AAPI community has stood ready to rally for justice and equality.

"Rather than withdraw, grow embittered, or be cowed by discrimination, the AAPI community has embraced and actively participated in American society. In addition to the tireless commitment of many AAPI families to raise their children as positive contributors to their various

communities – by investing in education, businesses, and opportunities for the future – individual AAPIs have distinguished themselves for their service and vision.

"This list of notables includes Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalanianoʻe, who in 1903 became the first Native Hawaiʻian/Pacific Islander to serve in Congress; Dalip Singh Saund, who in 1956 became the first Asian American elected to Congress; Hiram Leong Fong, who in 1959 became the first AAPI member of the US Senate; and Patsy Mink, who forty-two years ago this year became the first Asian American woman elected to the US Congress.

"Today this legacy continues. Earlier I mentioned Secretary Norman Mineta for his work instituting APA Heritage Month. Under the Clinton Administration, Secretary Mineta became the first AAPI appointed to a Cabinet-level position and is the first AAPI to be a cabinet member under two different Administrations. Congressman Robert Matsui was a member of the Democratic leadership serving as the highest-ranking AAPI in congressional history. Congresswoman Matsui now carries on the great work of her late husband. Furthermore, Governor Gary Locke, the first AAPI elected as governor of a lower 48 state, commands national attention.

"We are thankful to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and our current Democratic leadership, who have been vocal supporters of the AAPI community and recognize the contributions we have made and the struggles that continue.

"As Chair of the Congressional American Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), I am proud of the fierce advocacy of our Caucus members on important issues affecting the AAPI community. Through our CAPAC Task Forces, we have targeted such goals as eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities, enacting comprehensive immigration reform, fighting to create jobs, and providing educational opportunities for the underserved.

"CAPAC has had the privilege to work with our colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Native American Caucus to advance the dialogue on these important issues.

"The many AAPI communities participating in this year's APA Heritage Month should be proud of our diverse heritage. I look forward to continuing our work together as we remember where we have been and celebrate where we are going."

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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> .*