



# JUDY CHU 美國首位華人參議員來訪克城

**APIA Vote New Faces of Leadership Keynote Address – Cleveland February 18, 2012 Rep. Judy Chu**

Good evening! Thank you to Christine Chen and APIA Vote Michigan for inviting me here as you kick off your activities for the 2012 cycle.

APIA Vote's push for registering 2000 voters for this Presidential Election year is so important. We know how powerful civic engagement and advocacy can be. And we know it's important that Asian Americans have a seat at the table where decisions are being made, if we hope to advance our agenda.

### My Story

It was about 3 years ago, President Obama made a lightning bolt of an announcement that would change my life. That's when he revealed that Hilda Solis was his choice to be our Secretary of Labor. I was so thrilled because I had worked with Hilda in a coalition on redistricting, and I knew how great she was. But then it occurred to me the Congressional seat would be open. When I thought about the fact that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity, I decided I had to run.

It was an extremely tough primary. There were naysayers that said that someone like me, an Asian American, could not win this seat.

But I thought I had a chance. I thought I did because of my deep roots in the district, having been elected at that time 9 times over 26 years by the people of the district, from school board to city council member to Mayor, to state Assembly and then to the Board of Equalization. I thought I did because of my long history working to bring the community together as a coalition builder.

On July 14, 2009, I was elected. But what was even more amazing was the next day when President Barack Obama called me from the White House to congratulate me for being the first Chinese American woman elected to Congress in history!

Many people think that I always wanted to be an elected official. But growing up, I never even thought about, I saw so few role models. Then, I went to the university. I was a math major and thought I would be working in computers. In my first quarter as a freshman, I was walking across the quad and somebody handed me a flyer for this new thing called Asian American Studies and I took the class. A light went on in my head! I learned about the whole history of discriminatory laws passed against Asian Americans depriving them of citizenship, the right to own land and putting them in concentration camps.

There was a moment in that class that I'll never forget. There was a guest speaker. Her name was Pat Sumi. She was a strong and articulate community activist. I was thunderstruck. That was the very first moment that I thought, it is possible for an Asian American woman to be a leader.

That did it. I changed my major to psychology and became a community activist. But it still never occurred to me to run for office.

And then, I got involved in an issue in Monterey Park. An anti-immigrant backlash occurred. Many new immigrants were moving in, and the old time residents had a hard time with it. They wanted English-only on the signs in the city, and only English books in the library. The last straw was when there was an English Only resolution passed by the city council. A multiethnic group of people formed to fight this. We circulated many petitions, and the resolution was overturned. It became apparent that the make-up of the city council did not represent the population of the city. Out of this, I ran for the City Council, won, served as Mayor 3 times and spent the next 13 years working to bring together the community.

Then, a vacancy occurred for the State Assembly seat in my district, and I decided to run.

This is when I found out just how difficult it is to break that glass ceiling, to get to the next level when the stakes are so high. There are so many forces

operating within Sacramento that it is difficult to win unless you have legislators or powerful groups backing you. Since Asian Americans were not yet organized in the state, for instance there was no Asian American legislative Caucus, I had virtually none.

The Old Boy's Network chose a male to be their candidate, and because of their powerful backing, the Speaker at that time did not support me. Things looked bleak.

But then, there was a turning point in my campaign, and I remember it well. It was the moment that Congresswoman Hilda Solis decided to support me. You see, she had gone against the Old Boy's Network herself.

It was her support that gave me the momentum I needed to win. And I did!

From the State Assembly, I then got elected to the State Board of Equalization and from there, Congress.

I learned something very important from that experience. The importance of building coalitions; the coalition I had with Hilda Solis turned around my election.

CAPAC and the Tri-Caucus

Last year, I had the honor of being elected Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus or what we call CAPAC!

Today, CAPAC consists of Congressmembers of API descents and those Congressmembers who have large API constituencies in their district, and we are so proud that now we are 40 members strong!

Together, with our partners in the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucus – the Tri-Caucus – we make up over 40% of the Democratic members of the House! And with this strong coalition, we are able to not only advocate for the priorities of the API community – but for all minority communities – at the highest levels.

Last year, CAPAC met with several Cabinet level secretaries, and most significantly, had our first meeting with President Obama. During this meeting, we covered a range of issues affecting our community including immigration reform, health disparities, and data disaggregation that will illuminate such facts as Lao Hmong and Cambodians having a dropout rate as high as 40%. . . And we asked the President to speak at our API Gala in Washington DC. We said, you speak at the Congressional Black Caucus dinner, and at the Congressional Hispanic caucus dinner every year, but not yet at the Asian Caucus dinner, and yet your words will be broadcast to Asians all across America. Will you come? Well, he and his staff said yes, if you make sure the crowd is there. So we have decided to make this year's Asian Pacific Heritage month celebration in Washington DC bigger and better than ever, and we are inviting all of you from all across the nation to participate.

We're proud that we made a difference in so many critical areas. We've made a difference on health disparities on diseases like Hepatitis B. Hepatitis B so disproportionately affects Asian Americans, resulting in too many deaths through liver cancer. But the greatest tragedy of this disease is that it can be prevented through vaccinations. And yet, there's been so little action on this on a national basis. Well, we are so proud that finally, this year, the White House had it's first World Hepatitis Day, at which time the Administration rolled out a national strategic action plan

to address viral Hepatitis for the very first time on a national basis.

We made a difference for the Vietnamese fisherfolk in the Gulf Coast of Louisiana affected by the BP oil spill. About one third of shrimping boats in the area were Vietnamese American owned and operated, and one in five Southeast Asian Americans in the region worked in the seafood processing industry. So many of them do not speak English, and they are isolated by language and culture. As a result, when the oil spill happened, they could not get the proper compensation for their losses. They had nowhere else to turn, so they asked us, CAPAC to organize a town hall to bring attention to the issue. Our efforts paid off when Ken Feinberg the Administrator of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, announced that he would increase the payments made to shrimpers and crabbers from 2 times their losses to 4 times their losses. This was a big win for the fisherfolk community!

And, we are making a difference on Anti-China bashing. During the November 2010,

both Republicans and Democrats engaged heavily in China-bashing in

campaign commercials, and we know

from our own history how that misguided fear

and anger can translate into

hate crimes and other attacks on Asian

Americans. We raised our concerns

about this inflammatory rhetoric to our leadership in the House

and to the White House directly, and both have committed to

refrain from this kind of messaging in 2012.

### Anti-China Ads/Recent Bigotry

All of you here know just how ugly and inflammatory racially charged messaging can be. Just in your neighboring state, people were eating potato chips in front of the TV last week, ready to enjoy the Superbowl. Suddenly on comes an ad – an Ad put out by a candidate for Senate, Pete Hoekstra. You know what I'm talking about. An obviously American born Asian woman is in a rice paddy with a coolie hat on, riding on her bike. As she gets to the camera, she says gleefully to the camera, Isn't it great that we get to steal your American jobs?

This was offensive, stereotypical and hateful. Worst of all, it played in Michigan, where 30 years ago, Vincent Chin was murdered. Vincent Chin was in a bar about to celebrate his wedding when 2 white unemployed autoworkers, thinking he was Japanese, bashed his head in with a baseball bat, shouting, "It is you Japanese who are taking away our jobs!" To make matters worse, the judge only gave the 2 murderers a \$3000 fine and no jail time. In the meanwhile, instead of going to Vincent's wedding, his friends and family went to his funeral.

So you know what hateful rhetoric can do. Well, there was a time when Asian Americans might be silent about Hoekstra's ad. NOT THIS TIME.

APIA Vote-Michigan jumped in right away to speak out against the ad and said that candidates should pledge to be respectful in campaigns. They contacted us, and we in CAPAC issued a statement denouncing the ad and demanding an apology and I went on CNN to do the same. Finally, Hoekstra had to take down the ad and the website. We should all consider this a triumph!

### A Sea of Change

This is the change we need to bring about. And we should bring it about. Today, AAPIs are the fastest

growing ethnic group in America... we are a growing force, and things are changing.

There was a time when the only Asian Americans that you saw on television was someone like Hop Sing, who played a cook on a show called Bonanza, and all he said, was, "You want dinner, boss?"

Today, you turn on the television and see Jeremy Lin all over the place, taking NBA basketball by storm! In fact, now, random Congressmembers come up to me and say, Hey how about that Jeremy Lin! And I say, "Yes", claiming credit, even though I don't even know the guy!

There was a time when Asian Americans so invisible in the Capitol that if you walked by an Asian American or Pacific Islander, you had to turn around and look – it was such an unusual phenomenon!

Today, we have 11 Asian Pacific Islanders Members of Congress. And out of President Obama's 19 cabinet members, 3 have been Asian American: Stephen Chu of the Department of Energy, Eric Shinseki of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Gary Locke with the Department of Commerce, who is now serving as the first Chinese American to be our U.S. Ambassador to China! All around the country, we have Asian Pacific Islander elected officials in local, state and federal offices. In fact, today, we have the greatest numbers of APIs in state and federal office in history.

### Civic Engagement

And I know that with the help of organizations like APIA Vote, this momentum will only continue to grow! And it must grow.

I think back to over 60 years ago, when 120,000 Japanese Americans were taken to concentration camps all around the country during World War II. They were accused of being spies, despite the fact that ? of them were U.S. citizens. They lost everything they had, home, businesses, possessions. In the end, not a single case of espionage was proven.

How could this happen? Because there not enough voices to say, we cannot let this happen.

Today, we must have voices to say, we cannot let this happen. We must have the voices to advocate for empowering our communities, and to speak out when injustice occurs.

Today, I look around this room, and I see the grassroot groups, the business leaders, the elected leaders... we have all of you.

And we need you now more than ever. Whether it is to advocate on issues affecting the community, volunteering on a campaign, running for an elected position, or exercising your right to vote, you can effect real change.

### GRANDFATHER STORY

I will never forget that day that I was on the floor of Congress in front of the 435 members of Congress. I could not bring my husband down with me. Instead, I was allowed to bring my 3 little nieces, ages 7, 10 and 14. So there they were standing behind me, as I was sworn in.

It was at that time that I reflected upon the fact that my grandfather came to this country with nothing. In fact, he faced the hostile laws of that time, such as that Chinese Exclusion Act, the California laws that prevented Asian Americans from owning land, and from being hired in any corporation. But he decided to make something of his life anyway. He opened up a small Chinese restaurant in Watts, and worked day and night and night and day. And he used that very expensive labor, his sons. And finally he was able to make ends meet. And now, 2 generations later, his granddaughter can be a member of Congress.

But what was even better was those 3 little girls could see with their very own eyes that it can be done.

I look forward to continuing to work with all of you. Together, we can increase our influence and become an even stronger voice across our nation. And together, I know we can make a difference for our communities and for future generations to come. Thank you all so very much!

