

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Reception Celebrating Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

May 13, 2024

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon.

Please have a seat, those who can—those who have a chair. [*Laughter*]

Well, it—what a beautiful day. And it is so good to be with so many dear friends and so many extraordinary leaders.

And of course, at the front and the most important of our leaders today, I have to acknowledge our President, Joe Biden, and him welcoming everyone to the White House. And Joe Biden, as everyone here knows, is a leader of courage and conviction and a fighter for freedom, justice, and equity for all Americans. [*Applause*] Yes.

And to the first Second Gentleman of the United States—who I know is here, but I don't see him at the moment—[*laughter*—my husband Doug Emhoff; to the members of our administration and the Members of Congress, including the members of CAPAC; and all of the distinguished guests, including some who I welcomed last week for the first ever AANHPI Night Market, hosted at the Vice President's Residence, it is an honor to gather with all of you.

The story of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders is the story of America herself. During AANHPI Heritage Month, we honor the leaders who shaped the earliest days of our Nation's history.

From the 1800s when Chinese Americans laid the tracks of the transcontinental railroad to the South Asian Americans who worked on farms and lumber mills and strengthened the agricultural base of the Pacific Coast; from the Japanese Americans of the 442d Combat Team who defended our freedom and liberty during World War II to the Filipino Americans who helped lead the historic Delano grape strike, resulting in more fair pay and basic workplace protections for agricultural workers; and then fast-forward to today, the leaders here and across our Nation who continue to make history every day.

This month—and every month—we honor and celebrate the heroes upon whose broad shoulders we all stand.

And as many of you may know, my mother arrived in the United States from India when she was 19 years old, by herself, never having been to America. My mother had two goals in her life: to raise her two daughters—my sister Maya and me—and to end breast cancer. She was a breast cancer researcher.

My mother never asked anyone's permission to pursue her dreams. And it is because of her character, strength, and determination that within one generation I stand before you as Vice President of the United States.

Like so many, we were raised, all of us, to understand the value of hard work, the importance of community, and the duty we all have to have some level of concern and care about the well-being of other people and our duty, then, to do something about it.

You know, there has been something quite perverse, I think, happening in our Nation over the last several years where some people would suggest that the measure of strength is based on who you beat down, instead of what we know: The true measure of strength is based on who you lift up.

In this moment, we see extremists who try to divide our Nation. We see so-called leaders with the biggest pulpits and the biggest bully pulpits who encourage and incite xenophobia and hate, including anti-Asian hate. We see a full-on assault, State by State, on our most fundamental freedoms and rights: the freedom to vote, the freedom to live safe from the horror of gun violence, the freedom from hate and bigotry, the freedom to love who you love openly and with pride, the freedom to learn and acknowledge our true and full history, and the freedom of women to make decisions about their own body—and not have their government tell them what to do.

And so, in this moment—I'll close by this—I am reminded of the words of one of my dearest friends and a mentor to me, Secretary Norm Mineta. Norm often said, "You have two arms: one to climb the ladder of success and one to reach down and pick someone up and pull them up behind you."

This AANHPI Heritage Month, let us all celebrate those who have lifted up our Nation, and to honor their memory, let us renew our commitment to lift as we climb.

And now it is my great privilege to introduce a leader who has inspired people around the world and who has fought for years with such courage for equity and for justice. Please welcome Lucy Liu.

Actor Lucy Liu. Good afternoon.

Vice President Harris. Good afternoon.

Ms. Liu. I am deeply honored to have been introduced by Vice President Kamala Harris, a trailblazer, a beacon of hope for women and people of color everywhere.

Vice President Harris. Thank you. Thank you.

Ms. Liu. Her historic—[*applause*]. Yes, yes, let's give it up for her.

Her historic election as the first female Black and Asian American Vice President of the United States is a testament to the limitless possibilities of the American Dream. Thank you for your leadership and your inspiration.

Vice President Harris. Thank you.

Ms. Liu. I was born and raised in New York with parents who both immigrated from China. And while we commemorate AANHPI Heritage Month here today, our household proudly celebrates it every month.

My son Rockwell possesses a deep awareness of our roots, exuding a profound confidence in his identity. Now, this is truly remarkable to me, especially considering the contrast to my childhood, where I felt I had to keep things secretive and distance myself from my heritage in order to have a stronger sense of belonging.

Now, as we gather to honor this heritage, and in the Rose Garden at the White House, I am struck by the irony that once inhibited my own path towards fearlessness. Our journey as Asian Americans is deeply rooted in history, marked by resilience, perseverance, and the relentless pursuit of justice.

From the struggles of our ancestors who first set foot on American soil to the generations that followed, we have contributed to the rich tapestry of this Nation, shaping its history and its future. Throughout history, we have faced formidable challenges in asserting our rights, including the right to vote and be counted.

When Chinese immigrants arrived during the California Gold Rush, we battled against discrimination and practices like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, aimed at disenfranchising

us. Despite these obstacles, Asian Americans have persisted in their fight for equality and representation. In 1943, there was a significant victory when this Exclusion Act was repealed.

Subsequent decades saw the gradual dismantling of discriminatory policies. Today, as we confront the ongoing challenges of voter suppression and intolerance, we remain steadfast in our commitment to democracy, inspired by the sacrifices of those who came before us and fueled by the hope of a brighter future.

It is against this backdrop of struggle and progress that I have the privilege of introducing a leader who embodies the values of equality, unity, and progress; a President who is a devoted husband, father, and grandfather and believes, like we do, in the bond of family and the pride of our immigrant heritage.

Mr. President, all of us here—including my son Rockwell—stand united with you with open hearts and minds to continue this journey of collaboration to celebrate AANHPI excellence.

Esteemed guests, the 46th President of the United States, President Joe Biden.

The President. My name is Joe Biden. I work for Kamala Harris. *[Laughter]*

I asked her to be my Vice President because I knew I needed somebody smarter than me. *[Laughter]*

Folks, Happy Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander Heritage Month here in the White House.

And thank you, Lucy, for that introduction and all you do for the community, on and off the screen.

Kamala, our historic Vice President, who represents the community with such great—with such great pride. And, Doug—I know you're here somewhere, but wherever you are, Doug—he's back there? Okay, anyway—our first Second Gentleman—*[laughter]*—he's here along with so many of our friends.

Mazie and Tammy, two leaders in the United States Senate. There you are. And chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Representative Judy Chu.

Vice President Harris. She's over there.

The President. There you are, Judy.

And other members who represent the community in growing numbers in each election.

As Kamala mentioned, that includes the family of the late Norm Mineta, who was a great friend and a great leader. In fact, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the creation of the White House Initiative on Asian American, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Norm supported it.

And by the way, I was educated by a guy who—if I can digress for just a moment—one of the people—when I first got here, I didn't want to be here because I just lost my family in an accident. And there was a guy named Danny Inouye who came along. Danny had more grit and determination than anybody I ever knew. And he was a guy who stood tall. He—and this is a guy who—anyway, I don't want to get started, but—*[laughter]*—but he taught me an awful lot.

Several Commission members are here as well, and I want to thank them. Kamala and I are committed to having an administration—when we got elected, we said we're going to have an administration that looks like America, and it does. We do.

We have members of every community, who—so many of whom are here today, including our Cabinet, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai. Katherine—where is—there she is. Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su. *[Laughter]*

And above all, thanks to all of you—leaders of labor, business, philanthropy, civil rights, arts and culture, and so much more. All of you represent a simple truth: There is no singular Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander identity. And diversity in those cultures, the breadth of achievement has shaped the strength and fabric of this country. But it's not all the same.

The fastest growing demographic in the United States, you represent how we are, as a nation of immigrants, a nation of dreamers, a nation of freedom.

And that's the America we share. We've made incredible progress together: 15 million new jobs—a record; historic-low levels of unemployment; record small-business creation. In fact, loans from our Small Business Administration to the AANHPI small business is up 44 percent compared—by the way, the dog is cheering for that. That was a dog up front here. [Laughter] He's all for it. He's employed.

And look, because we expanded the childcare tax credit during the pandemic, not—and by the way, not one Republican voted for it—we cut Asian American child poverty by nearly 25 percent—a record low.

Lower costs across the board. We finally beat Big Pharma and got Medicare the ability to negotiate lower drug prices. For example, we capped insulin at \$35 a month, down from \$400. It only cost them—it only cost them 10 bucks—to make it. And seniors on Medicare, including your parents and grandparents, are beneficiaries.

It not only saves lives, but interesting fact around my Republican friends: It saves the budget \$160 billion—\$160 billion—because Medicare no longer has to pay those exorbitant fees and prices.

And we're now making college more affordable by relieving student debt for millions of students, including so many in the community. And we secured the largest increase in Pell grants in a decade. It matters now—nearly 40 percent of N—AANH—NHPI students rely on Pell grants to get to college—nearly 40 percent.

More people have health insurance today than ever before in the history of this country, including in the community. And I'm proud my administration announced DACA recipients will finally get access to health care through the Affordable Care Act.

And by the way, I proposed the most comprehensive immigration reform bill in decades. It includes a pathway to citizenship for "Dreamers" and expands the number of green cards so more families can build their American Dream together.

And now Congress has to act and do the right thing. I'll keep moving—we're both going to keep pushing forward.

Thanks to decades of advocacy by so many of you, I'm proud our administration recently—we recently announced major changes to how Federal Government collects and reports Federal data on race and ethnicity. By disaggregating data on the community, this is—that it so deserves, we can better serve the entire community—individual communities.

After all, our Government didn't really see Korean Americans distinctly from Filipino Americans. But how can we caress [address; White House correction] each community's needs without an understanding of the specific needs? We're changing that.

We're also making historic investments to rebuild roads and bridges and lead the world in science and innovation. That includes the most significant investment ever in climate in the history of the world—over \$368 billion—and there's so many leading the way.

I signed the most significant gun safety law in nearly 30 years, which matters, as I mourned with you in Atlanta, Monterey Park, and Half Moon Bay. I've been there to meet the families. Together, we won't stop until we finally ban assault weapons as well.

I can go on. But look, the point here is, we're lowering costs, expanding opportunities, and protecting freedoms. That's in stark contrast to my predecessor's view of America and his view of all of you.

We'll never forget him lying about the pandemic. We'll never forget the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic. I'm proud to have had to—I'm not proud to have had to, but I'm proud to have signed and—the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act with your support.

We've also provided historic value in funding for public safety and local communities, and it's bringing us results. We're seeing a 50-year low in violent crime in America. San Francisco, for example, anti-Asian hate crimes are down 75 percent over the last 2 years.

When Trump was in office, he enacted a \$2 trillion tax cut, overwhelmingly benefiting the super wealthy and the very biggest corporations, that exploded the Federal deficit. His administration added more to the Federal debt than any previous Presidential term in American history. And now he and his congressional Republican friends want to do it again.

At the same time, he wants to, quote—I love his terminology—"terminate" the Affordable Care Act, kicking millions of you and your families off of insurance and taking away protections for preexisting conditions, affecting millions of people.

And Social Security and Medicare—my predecessor says, quote, "There's a lot we can do in terms of cutting." Not on our watch.

Vice President Harris. Not on our watch.

The President. Not on our watch.

And he brags about cutting *Roe v. Wade*, making sure it's overturned. But Kamala and I are going to keep fighting to restore *Roe v. Wade* until it's the law of the land again.

While we fight for comprehensive immigration reform, he calls immigrants "rapists" and "murderers." He says they are "not people"—they are "not people." He says immigrants are, quote, "poisoning the blood of our country." Folks, my predecessor wants a country just for some of us. We want a country for all of us.

Let me close with this. Two years ago, I signed the landmark law to pave the way for the creation of the National Museum of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander History and Culture. [*Applause*] It matters.

There are those who want to erase history. But together, you're making history. We're making history.

And what I see in all of you, including some incredibly special people here today. Born in the Philippines, she came to America as a follow—to follow her dream. She started working at a restaurant at an airport before working her way up to become one of the best chefs in the world. And now the first woman Asian American Executive Chef of the White House, Chef Cris.

Come here. Come on up here, Chef.

[*At this point, White House Executive Chef Cristeta "Cris" Comerford joined the President at the podium.*]

She is incredible. I—matter of fact, I was 20 pounds lighter when I came. [*Laughter*]

Chef Comerford. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much.

Chef Comerford. Thank you. I love you.

The President. You deserve it. Love you too.

Chef Comerford. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

She's been here for over two decades, serving Presidents of both parties. She's prepared dinners for heads of state, celebrities—from everyone from Super Bowl champions to everyday heroes. And above all, she's a world-class culinary leader who leaves you with a sense of wonder about American forever—as a forever nation of immigrants.

Look, a story all of you represent in one form or another: Maybe your family has been here for generations or you're here for the first—you're the first one here. Maybe you never thought you'd be here at the White House, but you are here at the White House—the "people's house," your house—your house.

We see you. There's always been a competing set of values and visions in America that's existed never as starkly as today: one held by my predecessor of revenge and retribution; the other of hope and opportunity that we all share—honesty, decency, faith, fairness.

That's the future we're building together. And it's because of you. And I mean this sincerely. It's because of you I've never been more optimistic about America's future in my entire career.

We just have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. And there is nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we act together. And that's what we have to do, and that's what we are doing.

God bless you all, and may God protect our troops. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5:10 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 14.

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