

Remarks on the Observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and Presentation of the President's Volunteer Service Awards

May 10, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Please be seated. Thanks for coming, and welcome to the White House. I'm glad you're here. Fifteen years ago, my dad—or as we call him around the house, “number 41”—signed a law designating May as Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. This afternoon, number 43—[laughter]—has the honor of continuing number 41's tradition. And we're glad you're here.

I thank you for joining me to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. Across our Nation, Americans of Asian Pacific descent are leaders in fields from education to business to government. Every day, Asian Pacific Americans make our communities more vibrant, and this afternoon we honor the many contributions that are made to our great democracy.

I want to thank Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao for being here today. Madam Secretary, we're proud you're here. Thank you for serving. A former member of my Cabinet, now retired—well, not exactly retired—[laughter]—but a close friend: Norm Mineta is with us. Thanks for coming, Mr. Secretary. You're looking pretty good. Yes, I see that. [Laughter] I appreciate the fact that Deputy Secretary of Commerce David Sampson is here. He cannot claim any Asian American heritage, but nevertheless, he is serving well. [Laughter] Thank you for coming.

I appreciate the members of the President's Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders who are here today. Thanks for serving. Thanks for your good work. I want to thank the recipients of the President's Volunteer Service Award. We will talk about you all a little later on here. But we're honored you're here.

I do want to thank the members of the diplomatic corps who have joined us. Am-

bassadors, thank you for being here. We're honored to have—by your presence.

I do want to thank World War II veterans and Japanese American veterans who have joined us today. We're proud to have you here, and thanks for this great example you've set for those who wear the uniform today. We're really glad you're here.

The story of Asian Pacific Americans is an important part of the American story. During the 19th century, Asian Pacific Americans endured great hardships, for example, to lay the tracks for our first transcontinental railroad. During times of war, Asian Pacific Americans have defended our Nation with honor and courage. And during times of prejudice, Asian Pacific Americans have overcome discrimination to build strong and lasting communities in our country.

Today, more than 15 million Americans can trace their lineage to Asia or the Pacific Islands. We see the influence of these Asian Pacific Americans across all our society. All you have to do is look to see the tremendous impact our fellow citizens are making. It's a great passion for art and music which brings new culture—new life to our cultures. The love of learning has helped improve our schools and raise the standards for all children. A commitment to innovation and free enterprise has helped strengthen our economy and created jobs.

In 2004, I formed a Presidential advisory commission to examine ways of expanding economic opportunities for Asian Pacific Americans. And tomorrow I will receive the commission's final report, and I'm looking forward to getting it.

As Asian Pacific Americans realize the opportunities of our Nation, they're also answering the call to give back to our communities, and by doing so, they create new

opportunities for others. Men and women of Asian Pacific descent volunteer their talents and time to help their neighbors in a lot of ways. This afternoon, we honor six Americans of Asian Pacific heritage with our Nation's highest honor for community service: the President's Volunteer Service Award.

The volunteers we recognize have set a powerful example for all Americans. They have served important causes, from providing aid to victims of natural disasters to sharing the joy of science with students to raising money for libraries in far away lands. These acts of kindness have changed lives; they've laid the foundation for stronger communities; and they really speak to the strength of America. Our strength is not our military, although we'll keep it strong, and our strength is not necessarily the size of our economy, although we'll keep it robust. The true strength of the country lies in the hearts and souls of citizens who hear the call to love a neighbor and do something about it.

One of the honorees is a Virginia Tech student. I had the privilege of meeting Adeel Khan. See, Adeel is the president of the student government at Virginia Tech. He took office shortly before the terrible violence hit that campus. He's had what we call a difficult presidency. [*Laughter*] And yet he understood the need for leadership. He's an impressive guy. He worked hard with classmates to organize a

campuswide vigil. He helped bring that important community together. He dealt with the tragedy the way you'd expect a leader to deal with tragedy. This good young man helped lead his fellow students in healing. And we ought to know, as he did so, it helped heal the entire Nation.

We see the true spirit of the Asian Pacific American community in the compassion and decency of citizens like Adeel. We're grateful for the many contributions that Asian Pacific Americans have made to our Nation. We're proud to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. I congratulate all the honorees. And now I ask Lieutenant Commander Roncska to read their citations.

[At this point, Lt. Cmdr. Robert A. Roncska, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the awards.]

I—thank you all for coming today. In our diversity, we find our strength; in our hearts, we find such wonderful compassion. Thank you all for setting a great example. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:26 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Statement on International Trade and Investment Policy May 10, 2007

The United States has a longstanding commitment to open economies that empower individuals, generate economic opportunity and prosperity for all, and provide the foundation for a free society. Economic freedom, supported by the rule of law, reinforces political freedom by encouraging

and supporting the free flow of ideas. To continue the advance of liberty and prosperity, my administration will work vigorously to promote open investment policies and free trade on a level playing field.

A free and open international investment regime is vital for a stable and growing