

represented the Commonwealth as an Assistant Attorney General—I look forward and am excited to meet those challenges head on.

Today, I stand before you and reiterate the one promise that I made throughout this campaign: I will never forget where I came from.

I am the son of a working class family and a product of public education from kindergarten through college.

The daily struggles I witnessed and experienced along with my family, friends and neighbors have made me who I am and have brought me here today.

I will remain true to that promise and to the commitments I made during this campaign, I will not forget where I came from.

## MINIMUM WAGE FOR FILIPINO DOMESTIC WORKERS IN HONG KONG

**TOM LANTOS**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 6, 2002*

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, Hong Kong is one of the most economically and culturally vibrant cities in the world, and its hard-working residents make an enormous contribution to the economic and political stability of the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, U.S.-Hong Kong relations have never been stronger, and ties between the governments and people of Hong Kong and the U.S. grow each day.

While there are many reasons for Hong Kong's ongoing success, due credit must be given to the over 230,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong who watch children, cook and clean while their Hong Kong employers are off at work. Most of the women who fill these domestic positions are from the Philippines, and the remittances of their wages back to the Philippines support entire families. But the sacrifices made by these Filipina maids are enormous. They must leave husbands, children, and other family members behind for years on end to work incredibly long hours, six days a week. Given the small size of Hong Kong apartments, most of these maids sleep on kitchen or bathroom floors, or even in the closet. The minimum wage for Hong Kong maids is set at just \$470 per month, and not all employers comply.

During an official visit to Hong Kong in January, it was brought to my attention that the trade association representing the employers of Hong Kong maids had proposed cutting the minimum wage for maids by 14%. Given Hong Kong's leadership role in the Asia-Pacific region, I was frankly shocked to hear that such a proposal had even been put on the table.

In meetings with Members of the Hong Kong Legislative Council and other senior Hong Kong officials, I raised strong concerns regarding this proposed minimum wage cut, echoing the strong statements against the proposal made by many Hong Kong residents and Filipina maids. I indicated that I was very sympathetic to the fact that many Hong Kong families have had to tighten their belts as a result of the recession in Hong Kong, but that it was not a solution to Hong Kong's economic problems to cut the wages of those who earn the least. Hong Kong's Filipina maids keep

Hong Kong running and single-handedly support tens of thousands of families back home in the Philippines. The proposal to cut their wages was unfair and unethical, a fact realized by many solid citizens in Hong Kong.

It is therefore my great pleasure to report that the proposal to cut the minimum wage for Hong Kong's maids has been rejected by the Hong Kong government. This decision by the government demonstrates the wisdom of Hong Kong's leadership on economic and other important issues, and shows why U.S.-Hong Kong relations will only grow stronger.

I have attached a recent article from the *Economist* regarding this critically-important issue, and urge my colleague to read it in its entirety.

### AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF HAPPINESS—THE FILIPINA SISTERHOOD

[From the *Economist*, Dec. 22, 2001]

Once a week, on Sundays, Hong Kong becomes a different city. Thousands of Filipina women throng into the central business district, around Statue Square, to picnic, dance, sing, gossip and laugh. They snuggle in the shade under the HSBC building, a Hong Kong landmark, and spill out into the parks and streets. They hug. They chatter. They smile. Humanity could stage no greater display of happiness.

This stands in stark contrast to the other six days of the week. Then it is the Chinese, famously cranky and often rude, and expatriate businessmen, permanently stressed, who control the city centre. On these days, the Filipinas are mostly holed up in the 154,000 households across the territory where they work as "domestic helpers", or amahs in Cantonese. There they suffer not only the loneliness of separation from their own families, but often virtual slavery under their Chinese or expatriate masters. Hence a mystery: those who should be Hong Kong's most miserable are, by all appearances, its happiest. How? The Philippine government estimates that about 10% of the country's 75 million people work overseas in order to support their families. Last year, this diaspora remitted \$6 billion, making overseas Filipino workers, or OFWs, one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange. Hong Kong is the epicentre of this diaspora. Although America, Japan and Saudi Arabia are bigger destinations of OFWs by numbers, Hong Kong is the city where they are most concentrated and visible. Filipina amahs make up over 2% of its total and 40% of its non-Chinese population. They play an integral part in almost every middle-class household. And, once a week, they take over the heart of their host society.

It was not always thus. Two generations ago, the Philippines was the second-richest country in East Asia, after Japan, while Hong Kong was teeming with destitute refugees from mainland China. Among upper-class families in the Philippines, it was common in those days to employ maids from Hong Kong. But over the past two decades Hong Kong has grown rich as one of Asia's "tigers", while the Philippines has stayed poor. Hong Kong is the closest rich economy to the Philippines, and the easiest place to get "domestic" visas. It has the most elaborate network of employment agencies for amahs in the world.

#### A BED IN A CUPBOARD

Although the Filipinas in Hong Kong come from poor families, over half have college degrees. Most speak fluent English and reasonable Cantonese, besides Tagalog and their

local Philippine dialect. About half are in Hong Kong because they are mothers earning money to send their children to school back home. The other half tend to be eldest sisters working to feed younger siblings. All are their families' primary breadwinners.

Their treatment varies. By law, employers must give their amahs a "private space" to live in, but Hong Kong's flats tend to be tiny, and the Asian Migrant Centre, an NGO, estimates that nearly half of amahs do not have their own room. Some amahs sleep in closets, on the bathroom floor, and under the dining table. One petite amah sleeps in a kitchen cupboard. At night she takes out the plates, places them on the washer, and climbs in; in the morning, she replaces the plates. When amahs are mistreated, as many are, they almost never seek redress. Among those who did so last year, one had her hands burned with a hot iron by her Chinese employer, and one was beaten for not cleaning the oven properly.

The amahs' keenest pain, however, is separation from loved ones. Most amahs leave their children and husbands behind for years, or for good, in order to provide for them. Meanwhile, those families often break apart. It is hard, for instance, to find married amahs whose husbands at home have not taken a mistress, or even fathered other children. Some amahs show their dislocation by lying or stealing from their employers, but most seem incapable of bitterness. Instead, they pour out love on the children they look after. Often it is they who dote, who listen, who check homework. And they rarely stop to compare or envy.

Under such circumstances, the obstinate cheerfulness of the Filipinas can be baffling. But does it equate to "happiness", as most people would understand it? "That's not a mistake. They really are," argues Felipe de Leon, a professor of Filipinology at Manila's University of the Philippines. In every survey ever conducted, whether the comparison is with western or other Asian cultures, Filipinos consider themselves by far the happiest. In Asia, they are usually followed by their Malay cousins in Malaysia, while the Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese are the most miserable. Anecdotal evidence confirms these findings.

#### HAPPINESS IS KAPWA

Explaining the phenomenon is more difficult. The usual hypothesis puts it down to the unique ethnic and historical cocktail that is Philippine culture—Malay roots (warm, sensual, mystical) mixed with the Catholicism and fiesta spirit of the former Spanish colonisers, to which is added a dash of western flavour from the islands' days as an American colony. Mr de Leon, after a decade of researching, has concluded that Filipino culture is the most inclusive and open of all those he has studied. It is the opposite of the individualistic culture of the West, with its emphasis on privacy and personal fulfilment. It is also the opposite of certain collectivistic cultures, as one finds them in Confucian societies, that value hierarchy and "face".

By contrast, Filipino culture is based on the notion of *kapwa*, a Tagalog word that roughly translates into "shared being". In essence, it means that most Filipinos, deep down, do not believe that their own existence is separable from that of the people around them. Everything, from pain to a snack or a joke, is there to be shared. Guests in Filipino homes, for instance, are usually expected to stay in the hosts' own

nuptial bed, while the displaced couple sleeps on the floor. Small-talk tends to get so intimate so quickly that many westerners recoil. "The strongest social urge of the Filipino is to connect, to become one with people," says Mr de Leon. As a result, he believes, there is much less loneliness among them.

It is a tall thesis, so *The Economist* set out to corroborate it in and around Statue Square on Sundays. At that time the square turns, in effect, into a map of the Philippine archipelago. The picnickers nearest to the statue itself, for instance, speak mostly Ilocano, a dialect from northern Luzon. In the shade under the Number 13 bus stop (the road is off-limits to vehicles on Sundays) one hears more Ilonggo, spoken on Panay island. Closer to City Hall, the most common dialect is Cebuano, from Cebu. Hong Kong's Filipinas, in other words, replicate their village communities, and these surrogate families form a first circle of shared being. Indeed, some of the new arrivals in Hong Kong already have aunts, nieces, former students, teachers, or neighbours who are there, and gossip from home spreads like wildfire.

What is most striking about Statue Square, however, is that the sharing is in no way confined to any dialect group. Filipinas who are total strangers move from one group to another—always welcomed, never rejected, never awkward. Indeed, even Indonesian maids (after Filipinas, the largest group of amahs), and Chinese or foreign passers-by who linger for even a moment are likely to be invited to share the snacks.

The same sense of light-hearted intimacy extends to religion. Father Lim, for instance, is a Filipino priest in Hong Kong. Judging by the way his mobile phone rings almost constantly with amahs who want to talk about their straying husbands at home, he is also every amah's best friend. He is just as informal during his Sunday service in Tagalog at St Joseph's Church on Garden Road. This event is, by turns, stand-up comedy, rock concert and group therapy. And it is packed. For most of the hour, Father Lim squeezes through his flock with a microphone. "Are you happy?" he asks the congregation. A hand snatches the mike from him. "Yes, because I love God." Amid wild applause, the mike finds its way to another amah. "I'm so happy because I got my HK\$3,670 this month [\$470, the amahs' statutory wage]. But my employer was expecting a million and didn't get it. Now he's miserable." The others hoot with laughter.

The Filipinas, says Father Lim, have only one day a week of freedom (less, actually, as most employers impose curfews around dusk), so they "maximise it by liberating the Filipino spirit". That spirit includes communing with God. Some 97% of Filipinos believe in God, and 65%, according to a survey, feel "extremely close" to him. This is more than double the percentage of the two runners-up in the survey, America and Israel. This intimate approach to faith, thinks Father Lim, is one reason why there is virtually no drug abuse, suicide or depression among the amahs—problems that are growing among the Chinese.

#### THE LIFELINE TO HOME

There is, however, an even more concrete expression of *kapwa*. Quite simply, it is the reason why the Filipinas are where they are in the first place: to provide for loved ones at home. Most spend very little of their monthly HK\$3,670 on themselves. Instead, they take it to WorldWide House, a shopping mall and office complex near Statue Square. On Sundays the mall becomes a Philippine market, packed with amahs buying T-shirts,

toys and other articles for their siblings and children, and remitting their wages. More than their wages, in fact: many amahs borrow to send home more, often with ruinous financial consequences.

Father Lim tells a story. An eminent Filipino died while abroad, and it was decided that local compatriots should bid the coffin adieu before its journey home. So amahs showed up to file past it. When the coffin arrived in the Philippines and was re-opened, the corpse was covered from head to toe with padded bras, platform shoes, Nike trainers, and the like, all neatly tagged with the correct addresses.

It is their role as a lifeline for the folks at home that has earned the OFWs their Tagalog nickname, *bayani*. By itself, *bayani* means heroine, and this is how many amahs see themselves. Another form of the word, *bayanihan*, used to describe the traditional way of moving house in the Philippines. All the villagers would get together, pick up the hut and carry it to its new site. *Bayanihan* was a heroic, communal—in other words, shared—effort.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that *Bayanihan House* is the name the amahs have given to a building in Hong Kong that a trust has made available to them for birthday parties, hairstyling classes, beauty pageants and the like. One recent Sunday, during a pageant, one of the contestants for beauty queen was asked how she overcame homesickness, and why she thought the people back home considered her a hero. She looked down into her audience of amahs. "We're heroes because we sacrifice for the ones we love. And homesickness is just a part of it. But we deal with it because we're together." The room erupted with applause and agreement.

"Nowadays, *bayanihan* really means togetherness," says Mr de Leon, and "togetherness is happiness". It might sound too obvious, almost banal, to point out—had not so many people across the world forgotten it.

#### IN HONOR OF THE FIREFIGHTING VESSEL "JOHN J. HARVEY"

#### HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 6, 2002

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay special tribute to *John J. Harvey*, the oldest and, now, most famous firefighting vessel on the Hudson River. On September 11, 2001, the crew of *John J. Harvey* demonstrated exceeding valor in aiding the rescue efforts of the New York City Fire Department.

*John J. Harvey* was built seventy years ago in order to update and improve the New York City Fire Department's aging fleet of steam-powered fireboats. The boat was the first vessel of its kind with internal combustion engines, a feature that gave *John J. Harvey* the capacity to pump 18,000 gallons of water a minute—twenty fire engines' worth—in streams up to twenty-five stories high.

*John J. Harvey* served in New York Harbor until 1995, when it was taken out of service for budgetary reasons. During her years of outstanding service, she participated in some of the most memorable fire rescue missions in New York Harbor. She fought the inferno that

destroyed the ocean liner *Normandie* and doused the flames on a sinking munitions boat. As part of the annual Fourth of July celebration, *John J. Harvey* shoots gushing streams of water high into the sky, forming an arc through which passing ships can speed. As a result of her past deeds, she was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

Prior to the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center, *John J. Harvey* had been operated by her owners as a working fireboat museum giving free trips and educational tours up and down the Hudson River and at Pier 63 Maritime. As news of the disaster at the World Trade Center spread, the crew of *John J. Harvey* began racing towards Pier 63 Maritime from all parts of New York. They recognized that the fireboat was uniquely suited to provide invaluable help to the FDNY and NYPD at this time of crisis.

Once it arrived at the scene of the attack, *John J. Harvey* immediately began ferrying ash-caked survivors away from the collapsed buildings. A member of the crew later recalled how roughly 150 people hurled themselves over the gunwales, some leaving their shoes behind, in order to escape. As *John J. Harvey* was rescuing these people, a call came in from the Fire Department: They desperately needed water pressure.

Upon hearing this request, the crew dropped off the survivors in safety at pier 40 and rushed *John J. Harvey* to the sea wall at the World Financial Center. As they started to rev up the water pumps on the boat, the crew recognized that they had a serious problem. *Harvey's* 3-inch manifold valves, designed for providing water of a different diameter to the modern 2½ inch hose being used by FDNY. Nobody had any adapters. Tim Ivory, the boat's chief engineer, was under intense pressure knowing that many lives were dependant on *Harvey* to provide water quickly. He remembered that some of the water guns, designed for shooting water into the air, had nozzles that were 2½ inches in diameter. He cleverly improvised by taking a sledgehammer and jamming soda bottles and wood into the nozzles, so as to redirect the water into the hoses from the guns.

*John J. Harvey* spend the next 80 hours pumping water to firefighters working in the wreckage. Since all of the fire hydrants west of the disaster site were not operational, *John J. Harvey*, along with the city's two remaining large fireboats, *Fire-Fighter* and *McKean*, provided much of the necessary water to fight the fires that continued to burn at the site of the World Trade Center.

I particularly want to recognize the brave crew members of *John J. Harvey*. On the day of the attack, the following people rushed to the rescue: Chase B. Welles (who quickly recognized the need to be of service), Huntley Gill (who piloted the boat on 9/11), Tim Ivory (whose ingenuity saved the day), Tomas J. Cavallaro (who worked tirelessly to supply the crew) and Andrew Furber (Assistant Engineer, who helped rescue workers extract bodies and clear debris as a welder). Later that day they were joined by John Doswell, Jean Preece and Pamela Hepburn who helped rescue workers. The following morning Captain Robert Lenney (who spent 16 years as pilot of