

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

December 29, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President-Elect of the United States
Presidential Transition Office
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear President-Elect Biden:

In service of your stated goal to build an Administration that looks like America and is more representative and diverse than ever before, we, the undersigned Members of Congress, write to urge you to ensure that the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community is included in both the personnel and policy priorities of your Administration. That must include an AAPI Cabinet Secretary. Although you promised to build the most diverse Cabinet in history, AAPIs have so far been excluded from the 15 Cabinet Secretary slots that oversee executive departments and are responsible for shaping and implementing your Administration's policies. While we applaud your historic selection of Kamala Harris to be the first woman, first Black, and first Asian American Vice President in our nation's history, we are deeply concerned that for the first time in over two decades, there may not be a single AAPI represented amongst the 15 Cabinet heads in our federal government.

The AAPI community is the fastest growing racial population in the nation and makes up 7% of the total United States population. AAPIs are also the fastest growing segment of the U.S. electorate and turned out in record numbers this year, with over two-thirds of the AAPI vote supporting your election. There are over 2 million AAPI workers in the healthcare, transportation, and service industries that are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, there are nearly 2 million Asian American-owned businesses that generate over \$700 billion in annual revenue who are facing dire economic impacts, as well as millions of AAPIs who are facing surging unemployment and anti-Asian discrimination due to the current crisis. Furthermore, this pandemic has disproportionately impacted the over one-third of AAPIs who are limited English proficient, as well as the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community, which continues to face some of the highest COVID-19 infection and mortality rates across the nation.

Unfortunately, many of these concerns are overlooked due to the long history of exclusion the AAPI community has faced. The history of AAPIs in the United States has been shaped by discriminatory laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 – the first law to explicitly ban an entire group of people from coming to the United States based solely on their race – the exclusionary Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917, and the signing of Executive Order 9066, which led to the internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. This painful history of exclusion is one that is still often felt today. For too long, AAPIs have been

overlooked in critical decisions pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and AAPIs continue to be left out of important policy discussions impacting communities of color. We see this in topics ranging from the disproportionate health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to critical policy priorities like immigration reform.

The need for diversity at the highest levels is not for the sake of optics. It's about ensuring all experiences are reflected in our decision making. As we know, "personnel is policy." And when we have diverse leaders in positions of power, it leads to more inclusive policies that better serve the entirety of our country. That is why we strongly believe there must be an AAPI Cabinet Secretary in your administration, just as there has been for over 20 years.

We are thrilled that incredible Black, Hispanic, Native American, women, and LGBTQ leaders have been named as Cabinet Secretaries, breaking barriers for communities who have been left out for so long. But without an AAPI Cabinet Secretary, the inclusionary vision of this Cabinet is incomplete. We know from our own experiences representing different cross sections of America that embracing diversity is the key to our success. Our unity allows us to achieve victories on behalf of all Americans, which is more critical now than ever as we work to heal the divisions in our nation. That is why, last week, leaders of the Congressional Tri-Caucus, which includes the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, issued a joint statement saying that a diverse Cabinet must include an AAPI at the Secretary level.

This same commitment to diversity and inclusion should be reflected at the top of our government. Not including an AAPI Cabinet Secretary for the first time in over two decades would erode the historic gains the AAPI community has made and send the wrong message that "diversity" does not include AAPIs. In order to truly build the "most diverse Cabinet in history" and a government that reflects the full diversity of our country, there must be an AAPI Cabinet Secretary. Close to equal is not equal.

In order to address these urgent concerns of AAPI exclusion, we request that you meet with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) prior to making any additional Cabinet nominations. Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Judy Chu, CAPAC Chair
Rep. Grace Meng, CAPAC First Vice Chair
Rep. Mark Takano, CAPAC Second Vice Chair
Rep. Ted W. Lieu, CAPAC Whip
Rep. Andy Kim, CAPAC Freshman Representative
Sen. Tammy Duckworth
Sen. Mazie Hirono
Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto

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Rep. Gregory W. Meeks
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Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Grace Napolitano
Rep. Richard E. Neal
Rep. Joe Neguse
Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Rep. Ilhan Omar
Rep. Jimmy Panetta
Rep. Chris Pappas
Rep. Scott Peters
Rep. Chellie Pingree
Rep. Mark Pocan
Rep. Katie Porter
Rep. Ayanna Pressley
Rep. Jamie Raskin
Rep. Kathleen M. Rice
Rep. Max Rose
Rep. Harley Rouda
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard
Rep. Raul Ruiz
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Rep. Adam Schiff
Rep. David Scott
Rep. Brad Sherman
Rep. Darren M. Soto
Rep. Jackie Speier
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Rep. Norma Torres
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Rep. Lori Trahan
Rep. Lauren Underwood
Rep. Juan Vargas
Rep. Marc Veasey
Rep. Filemon Vela
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez
Rep. Peter Welch
Rep. Jennifer Wexton
Rep.-elect Kaiali'i Kahele
Rep.-elect Marilyn Strickland
Rep.-elect Deborah Ross