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Remarks on the Observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

May 17, 2002

The President. Elaine, thank you very much. Welcome to your house—[*laughter*]—the White House. I want you to know, Norm, I welcome Republicans, Democrats—[*laughter*]—people who don't care—[*laughter*]—all Americans. You're welcome here. I am honored to welcome you. I didn't realize you sponsored the legislation that my dad—we call him "number 41"—signed, which permanently made the celebration of Asian and Pacific American culture a month-long event. And that's what we're honoring today.

I'm so proud to be the President of a diverse nation, a nation with 13 million Americans of Asian or Pacific Island heritage. What a great country, to welcome such diversity. Whether you're here by birth, or whether you're in America by choice, you contribute to the vitality of our life. And for that, we are grateful.

I also appreciate service to our Government and our country. I picked two fabulous members of my Cabinet from Asian Pacific backgrounds. You've seen them both. One lady who wasn't born in America, yet because of the dreams of her mother and father and because our country can be a welcoming country, was able to get a good education, and here she sits in the Cabinet of the President of the United States.

Another man, a man not of the same political party as I am but a man who loves his country just as much as I do, a person who, as a young boy, was interned in a camp for Japanese Americans on our own soil—a moment that is not a good chapter in our history—and yet had the courage to fight for change and for the dignity of every American, and now sits in the Cabinet of the President of the United States. I am fortunate to have them in my Cabinet. I appreciate their advice, and I appreciate the great job they're doing on behalf of all Americans—all Americans.

I want to thank Senator Inouye for being here. He's one of the fine distinguished Members of the United States Senate. He's an ally when it comes to defending our Nation. He understands what it means to serve your country and be prepared for the defense of America. Senator, you're doing a great job. Thank you for coming. I also want to thank Congressman David Wu from Oregon for being here as well.

I want to thank Delegate Faleomavaega. [*Laughter*] Did I even come close? [*Laughter*] Well, at least I gave it my best shot, Eni. [*Laughter*] How about just Eni? Thank you for coming from the American Samoa.

We've got friends of ours from Guam, the Guam Senate: Senate Leader Edward Calvo and the House Speaker, Tony Unpingco. Thank you all for coming. I'm honored you both are here. You are welcome.

I want to thank Susan Allen, the president of the U.S. Pan Asian American Chamber of Commerce. Thank you, Susan, it's great to see you again.

Richard, I want to thank you for filling this room and the whole house with incredible music. Man, what a talent. And I appreciate you sharing it with us. You help make a special day more special. And Lisa, thank you for bringing your beauty here. [*Laughter*]

I'm looking around for Dat Nguyen. Is he here? He's supposed to be here.

Audience members. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Yes, he's a Texan. [*Laughter*] He's a mighty Texas A&M Aggie, middle linebacker for the Dallas Cowboys, came from a Vietnamese family. He's a great story, and I just wish they'd win a couple more games. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank John Tsu, the Chairman of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. John, thank you very much, and Russell Wong, a great actor, for being here as well. And welcome to you all.

The history of Asian Pacific Americans is really a history of great patriotism, people who were willing to sacrifice. Incredibly enough, Asian Pacific Americans fought in the Civil War and, of course, World War II and the war on terror.

It's a story of hard work. Many of you have had relatives who came here early, early on in our country, that worked the railroad, helped build the infrastructure necessary for America to grow. It's a story of great achievement and great success. I mean, look at our Olympic teams, Asian Americans on our

Olympic teams, helping a unified country achieve in sports. It's a story of great business success, great cultural success. It's a story of influence on our society, scientific influence, architectural influence, music, art—significant contribution to our country. And for that, all of us are grateful.

Sadly, one of the greatest contributions, Asian contributions to our Nation was destroyed on September 11th. The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were designed by Seattle architect Minoru Yamasaki. He and his partners designed the towers. For 30 years, they stood as a testament to American ingenuity and prosperity. They served as a symbol—now, perhaps, as a symbol of a more innocent time.

But for me, I can assure you, it's a reminder, a symbol, that we must never forget there are people in the world who hate what we stand for, people who can't stand the thought that a diverse nation can be a free nation, people who hate freedom, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of press. They can't stand it. And I can't stand the thought that they hate us, and we're going to run them down, one by one, to protect our homeland.

They don't understand us. Mr. Senator, they just didn't understand us. They thought we were so weak and materialistic, we must not have believed in much, that all we'd do is kind of roll over and say, "Well, that's just what happens, you know," and go about our business. But that's not America. See, we defend our values and our freedom.

We fight for peace, and I want you to know, I long for peace—that's my dream, for peace. But we also fight for values that we hold dear. We believe strongly in America that each person needs to be judged on his or her individual values, abilities, and talents, that each life has dignity—has dignity—each individual matters, no matter where you're from, no matter how you were raised. That's what we fight for.

And as we fight for a safer world and a peaceful world, we've got to work for a better world here in America. One of the great traditions in our Asian communities is the understanding and love for education. It's amazing how well and how hard Asian youth work in school to get ahead. It is an unbelievably good example for all of us. Educational excellence must be the standard for every child in America. Access to good education must be the goal for every single child. In order to have a better tomorrow, we've got to continually work to make sure that every child gets educated—I mean every child.

In order to make sure there is a better tomorrow, we've got to make sure the entrepreneurial flame continues to shine brightly in America, that we're known as entrepreneurial heaven. I was pleased to see that there are nearly a million small businesses in America owned by Asian Pacific Americans. That's a lot. That's good news for our country. It means that people are willing to take risk and own their own business, which is a powerful part of the American experience. The role of Government's never to create wealth; it's to create an environment in which anybody from any background who's got a good idea can work and achieve the dream of owning your own business—and therefore, by the way, employing more people.

Talked about the tax cuts—Elaine talked about the tax relief. I viewed the tax relief that we passed as an incredibly important part of small business formation. Most small businesses are not incorporated; they pay income tax at the personal tax level. And therefore, when you reduce the personal income taxes, you help small businesses all across America.

As you know, we're working hard to make sure our homeland is more secure. The best way to make—the best defense is a good offense, no question about that. But you need to also understand that I'm mindful of American traditions, and as we work to make our borders more secure, for example, people will be treated fairly. Our INS must do a much better job of identifying who's coming into our country and why, but they've also got to do a better job of processing paperwork. It's inexcusable, the endless delays of paperwork that really do make it hard for families to function and to stay together.

I'm a strong believer that our Nation must pass what they call 245(i), immigration reform which will allow families to stay together. People who are here and applying for different paper shouldn't have to go back

to their country and then come back if one of the members is here legally with cards. It just doesn't make any sense. We need to be mindful of the dignity of each person in our country. And I know we can achieve that goal—good homeland security, better border control—and at the same time treating people with respect who are here in our land.

I also very much appreciate the bridge that our Asian Pacific community provides America to an incredibly important part of the world. And those are the nations of the Pacific. I spent some time there, and I gave a speech in China and Japan and South Korea where I said, "This is going to be the Pacific century." And I believe that. We are a Pacific nation, America. We've got a lot of incredibly important ties with China and Japan, Korea, the Philippines; all the nations represented in this room are an incredibly important part of our future.

We've got to work on trade issues, issues that open up trade between our respective nations, so that we're able to better exchange goods and services. That's to the benefit of not only workers here in America, of course; it's also to the benefit of workers in countries with whom we trade. We've got to continue dialog; we've got to make sure that we work closely together to promote peace, to fight off this scourge called terror.

And the Asian Pacific Americans of our country make those ties incredibly important. Not only do you help Americans understand the cultures in the countries, you, yourself, by your presence, export American values so that those countries understand us better.

And so it's my honor to welcome you all to this magnificent house, to welcome your contributions to the greatest land on the face of the Earth, to tell you how proud I am to be the President of a diverse nation in which people make contributions, all kinds of fantastic contributions, to let you know that as we fight, we do so with peace in our mind and that we do so to make the world a better place here at home.

I often say that if you want to join in the war against terror, do some good. If you want to fight evil, love your neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. That's a universal call. That's a call that is exhibited in neighborhoods all throughout America. See, the great strength of our country really isn't in the halls of government, Senator and Congressmen; it's in the hearts and souls of our citizens. That's what makes our country unique and strong and vibrant, is the great citizens of America.

And it's my honor to welcome such citizens to the White House. May God bless you all. And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao; Commerce Secretary Norman Y. Mineta; and television personality Lisa Ling.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

May 12

In the afternoon, the President returned from Camp David, MD, to Washington, DC.

May 13

In the morning, the President had intelligence briefings. He then traveled to Chicago, IL, where he met with Jerry and Adrienne Welenc, who have been foster parents to over 90 children and provide support to other foster parents. In the afternoon, he returned to Washington, DC.

May 14

In the morning, the President had intelligence and FBI briefings. Later, in an Oval Office ceremony, he signed the Hematological Cancer Research and Investment Education Act of 2002.

In the afternoon, he met in the Diplomatic Room at the White House with the Sunshine Kids, a group of children with cancer who were visiting Washington, DC.

The President announced his designation of the following individuals to represent the