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Thank you for that kind introduction. It's wonderful to be back in California. I am always overwhelmed with a very special feeling whenever I return to California -- the feeling of our state as the last frontier, the land of possibilities and opportunities. And the state blessed with such rich ethnic and cultural diversity such as found nowhere else in our mainland U.S.A.

Tonight's awardees reflect this rich ethnic mosaic in California: Ms. Sarah Kim, Mr. Jeffrey Matsui, Ms. Mai Cong, and the American Drug Abuse Program. All have played leadership roles in contributing to our community and the community at large.

This gathering also demonstrates anew what a reservoir of talent we have in our community and what great potential we face as we enter the decade of the 1990s.

The results of the 1990 census reinforce this reality. Asian Pacific Americans are the fastest growing minority group in this country. While the national population grew approximately 10 percent over the decade of the 1980s, Asian Pacific Americans grew by over 100 percent. As we enter the decade of the 1990s, we stand

at 7.3 million strong. This represents almost three percent of the U.S. population, double the percentage of ten years ago. (The American Jewish population numbers 4.3 million -- or 1.8 percent of the population.)

Two-thirds of our population is concentrated in five states: California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, and Illinois. Four of these states -- California, New York, Texas, and Illinois -- are key electoral votes where we have the potential of being important swing bloc votes in Presidential elections.

Asian Pacific Americans have much to be proud of. Despite being one of the newest immigrant groups to America, we have one of the highest income levels in the country. Forty percent of Asian Pacific Americans age 25 and over have had at least four years of college, nearly double the figure for non-Hispanic whites. We have settled in inner cities and made economic miracles out of them. Right here in Southern California are dozens of heartwarming examples of such economic revivals. Despite sometimes heartbreaking incidents of discrimination and hardship, our community has some of the greatest success stories that America can demonstrate.

We have achieved these gains through our unique system of values and our Asian philosophy. I am

speaking of our commitment to a strong family unit, our devotion to individual effort and hard work, our dedication to quality education, our willingness to sacrifice for the future, and our appreciation of freedom and the free enterprise system. The very ideals we hold so strongly are what allows us to prosper and advance in America.

Yet this freedom and opportunity we enjoy have not come without some pain and sacrifice. For example, the U.S. Government's internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is one of the darkest chapters in our nation's history. The lost years for these Americans can never be restored; the painful memories can never be erased. We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to Japanese Americans during the Second World War.

The struggle of Japanese Americans for redress is one of the finest examples of what our country is about, and of what we have pledged to protect and defend. As Attorney General Thornburgh stated in October of last year on the occasion of the presentation of the first Japanese Americans redress checks, "Your efforts have strengthened the nation's Constitution by reaffirming the inalienability of our civil rights."

We enjoy a precious system of government unsurpassed by any in the world. Even when that system failed those of you of Japanese descent, you never lost your faith in it. On the contrary, you believed that through the system you could achieve the justice which you had been denied. By finally admitting a wrong, a nation does not destroy its integrity but, rather, reinforces the sincerity of its commitment to the Constitution and hence, to its people. In forcing us to reexamine our history, you have made us only stronger and more proud.

Two years ago, we saw the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Adding to this tradition of commitment to civil rights, the Bush Administration has continued to support redress, and as I mentioned earlier, last year took part in its realization by authorizing compensation of \$20,000 to each eligible person of Japanese ancestry who was evacuated, relocated, or interned during World War II. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 affirms this administration's deep commitment to protecting the fundamental principles of individual rights contained in the Constitution, in times of war as well as in times of peace.

America's promise of opportunity -- that's the hallmark of our Asian Pacific American experience in this country. And yet America's unique promise of

opportunity is threatened by the current debate over quotas. Let me share with you my views on why the issue of quotas is so important to our community.

Since the mid-1960s, universities and colleges throughout this country have adopted admissions policies that seek to establish racial quotas or goals for their entering classes based on the national racial population percentages. Because Asian Pacific Americans comprised 1.5 percent of the national population in the 1980s before the latest census data, we are considered an "over-represented" minority when we are admitted in numbers larger than our 1.5 percent. This means that, despite superior qualifications, we are admitted in much smaller numbers than our qualifications demand.

At the University of California's Berkeley campus, the School of Law at Boalt Hall, in fact, maintains a separate wait list for each racial group. Asian Pacific American candidates are admitted only when an opening occurs on the "Asian" list, regardless of superior qualifications.

For a community which has suffered under discriminatory immigration laws, we are dealt a double blow when quotas are implemented. Until 1965, Asian Pacific American entry into the U.S. was severely

constrained. If quotas were implemented, we would be unfairly held down to this artificially depressed number.

Simply put, quotas discriminate against achievers. Quotas are demeaning. They place into question the qualifications of the very people they purport to benefit. The differences between the philosophies behind this quota debate are stark and stunning: one side wants merit hiring or admittance; the other side wants proportional representation. Proportional representation or a system of quotas hurts our community because our numbers are too few, and we are too talented.

I am thankful for officials like Congressman Dana Rohrabacher here in California who have pressed for accelerated federal action on several Asian Pacific discrimination complaints.

President George Bush has stated his opposition to quotas. And, he has pledged that he and his Administration will strike at discrimination wherever it exists -- that prejudice and hate have no place in America.

When a Vietnamese high school student, Hung Truong, was murdered in Houston last August, we all felt the pain. When Kim-Wah Shaw, a graduate student at Cornell University, was assaulted just a couple of

months ago by seven white high school students we were all assaulted. These incidents of tragedy touch us all in a very personal and deep way. They demand redress and justice. The political establishment must have the courage to step in on our side.

These incidents are but one aspect of a troubling phenomenon which the entire nation has been witnessing -- a startling rise in the number of hate crimes -- acts of violence by groups and by individuals based upon racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry. This bigotry is a poison which President Bush in his State of the Union Address vowed to fight.

This administration will join with the community leaders and law enforcement officials in the development of a national policy to enforce the laws that protect against such shameful crimes. We must work together toward a society protective of the constitutional rights of all its people.

We must continue to protect the rights of the individual no matter what their creed, nationality, or color. Good government is based on the individual and that each person's ability, dignity, freedom, and responsibility must be honored and recognized. The American people's steadfast support over the last 200 years of the principles of individual rights and

responsibilities has made our nation a lighthouse for the world's new democracies.

The President's nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the United States Supreme Court is also an affirmation of our pursuit of freedom and our traditional values.

Judge Thomas' life story is by now familiar to most of you. His birth certificate reads simply that he was born in "Pinpoint, Rural." He lived in a small one room wood-frame house for the first six and a half years of his life. His home didn't have electricity or indoor plumbing. His father left home while he was just a toddler.

The world of his youth was the world of segregated Georgia. All of life was segregated: schools, libraries, movies, and lunch counters. This was the reality in which Judge Thomas' mother and grandparents were determined to raise a boy who could provide for himself. Judge Thomas' family were honest, hardworking, and deeply religious people. They believed that hard work and decency were indispensable.

He was enrolled in St. Benedict's Grammar School, a segregated Catholic school. At home, at school, and at Church, Judge Thomas was constantly pushed and

encouraged to perform and achieve -- no matter what the odds were.

And achieve he did. He graduated near the top of his college class at Holy Cross and went on to get his law degree at Yale. He spent time as Assistant Attorney General in Missouri, a congressional staff member, a corporate lawyer, and Assistant Secretary of Education before chairing the Equal Employment Opportunity commission in the last administration. And he is only 43!

As a Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge Thomas will continue to excel because he understands well the properly limited role of the unelected judicial branch in a democracy. He recognizes that judges are not elected, and therefore should not override the judgments of the people's democratically elected representatives, except when required to do so by the Constitution.

The President put his finger on the chief issue of Judge Thomas' nomination when he said that "the main consideration, in addition to excellence and qualification, is the concept of interpreting the Constitution and not legislating from the federal bench."

Judge Thomas is committed to individual rights -- such as those enshrined in the Bill of Rights -- rather than so-

called "group rights." As Asian Pacific Americans, we must never forget the dangers of the government viewing its citizens as members of racial or ethnic groups rather than individuals. The group mentality that drives today's "benign racial preferences" resulted 50 years ago in Japanese-American internment camps.

Despite the fact that he grew up under difficult circumstances, Judge Thomas made it in America because he also had a family that loved and cared for him. His mother loved him. And when she could no longer care for him, she gave him to her parents to bring up, and they loved him too. And they cared enough to scrape together the money every year to put him in a school where he could receive a quality education. He got love and support from his family, and that gave him pride, and pride gave him confidence. This is a legacy that Asian Pacific Americans can relate to -- strong family commitment and support.

Some critics appear to oppose Judge Thomas' nomination because he did it on his own, rather than by taking advantage of government programs they helped put in place. Those critics stand against the very values that we as Asian Pacific Americans hold most dear. Clarence Thomas' triumph refutes their assumptions. His life declares that a good person of whatever color, creed, or background can rise in this country without

special favors from the state. This is the very reason our forefathers came to America.

Judge Thomas' nomination is a fight for equal justice. Just like the perseverance of Japanese Americans was kindled through the years by the enduring truth that justice ultimately prevails -- the fight for Judge Thomas' nomination is similarly kindled.

Judge Clarence Thomas deserves to be on the Supreme Court. He deserves to be confirmed. He has the intellect. He has the academic and professional background. He understands hardship. He understands discrimination. He has lived it. He is the product of the same values that we as Asian Pacific Americans hold most dear. If he wins, we win. If he loses, we lose, as a community and as a nation.

President Bush understands and shares these values. That's one of the reasons he chose Judge Thomas for the Supreme Court.

I was with President Bush last month during his swing through California. Sixty thousand Asian Pacific Americans turned out to greet him in Fountain Valley. The President saluted Asian Pacific Americans for our values -- our respect for hard work, self discipline, belief in free enterprise, and devotion to freedom.

He said: "You came in search of opportunity and you're finding it. You came to build a better America, and you are building it in a myriad of ways. You've enhanced our schools, our professions, our small and large businesses."

More of us need to take a greater role in our communities, generating greater participation in the community at large and in the mainstream American society. We are a people rich in cultural heritage with much to contribute to the American economic, social, and political scene. We must have the confidence that we can do this. Most important, we must do so because that is our responsibility as Americans and because America will be richer for our participation.

Thank you.

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