



**Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Washington State**  
Celebrating Unity and Civic Participation

March 18, 2010

Dear Senators Murray and Cantwell:

We are at a pivotal moment in the history of this nation. We are faced with a choice. We can stand by, and watch our leaders leave a broken immigration system in place that hurts millions of families, workers, and businesses, or we can stand up, and ask our leaders to stand up next to us, for comprehensive immigration reform. That's why Asian Pacific Americans are mobilizing on comprehensive immigration reform as never before. Our community members are deeply and negatively affected by a very broken immigration system and they are tired of waiting.

The Asian Pacific American community is one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the country and a powerful contributor to the economy. Our community urgently needs immigration reform that clears the backlogs and promotes family unity; protects workers; provides for legalization of the undocumented; and restores due process to the immigration system.

As you may know, nearly 450,000 Asian Pacific Americans have settled here in Washington state, and the Asian population has increased over 30% since 2000. Over two-thirds of Asian Pacific Americans (approximately 307,411) are foreign-born, with the largest numbers coming from the Philippines (53,528), China (53,479), Vietnam (47,781), Korea (47,011) and India (31,840).

We work, contribute to the economy and vote. Asian Americans own 5.8% of all firms in Washington. In 2002, Asian Americans owned over 26,000 businesses in the state, generated \$7 billion in sales and receipts, and employed about 45,000 people. Asian American buying power in Washington state accounts for over \$16 billion, or about 6.6% of the state's total consumer market. From 1990-2008, Asian American buying power in Washington grew over 400%.

Asian Pacific Americans understand the power of the vote and we will vote for those who lead on issues important to us, such as immigration reform. In 2008, over 63 percent of Asian Pacific American citizens were registered voters. That year, 83% of registered Asian Pacific Americans in Washington cast 150,000 votes. We have continued to register people to vote, educate and mobilize our communities on the issues that matter, and support elected officials who help us to achieve changes that move all of us forward. Immigration reform is one of our top priorities, and we expect our elected officials to support comprehensive immigration reform.

We are a discerning community of voters. We think for ourselves and vote accordingly. National statistics show that in the 1970s and 1980s, Asian Americans often voted Republican. However, the additional discrimination Asian Americans experienced after 9/11 and the GOP's rhetoric toward immigrants moved Asian American voters to a bloc who voted pro-immigrant. President Obama won the Asian American vote at 62% to 35%.

Asian Pacific Americans want to see the President and Congress we elected working to pass comprehensive immigration reform. We want to highlight a few critically important issues to Asian Pacific Americans, in a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

- **Visa backlogs and family reunification:** Asian Americans are very likely to have a family member caught in the visa backlogs. With so many close relatives overseas and our strong family culture, Asian Americans rely on family sponsorship to keep our families intact. Nearly half of the family members in the visa backlogs are relatives of Asian Americans. Our communities face long wait times to reunite with family members, with Indian immigrants waiting an average of 11 years and Filipinos waiting up to 23 years to join their family in the United States. Many Filipino war veterans have died waiting to reunite with their family members. Four to five million people are estimated to be in the worldwide family backlog.
- **Undocumented population:** There are nearly one million undocumented Asians in America. Asia is the second top sender of undocumented immigrants and four Asian countries rank in the top ten countries of origin for undocumented immigrants: Philippines, India, Korea and China.
- **Due process and immigration legal system issues:** When the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 passed, it set into motion deportation orders for non-citizens convicted of “aggravated” felonies. The 1996 laws expanded the definition of an “aggravated felony” to include non-violent crimes such as shoplifting and possession of marijuana, and were retroactive. Many Southeast Asians who had not naturalized were subject to removal as legal permanent residents under the new law. Since the law was retroactive, those who had already served time and had subsequently gone on to become exemplary parents, children, and community members were still subject to summary deportation without benefit of judicial review taking all factors into account. In 2003, approximately 1,400 Cambodians, 1,900 Laotians, and 4,000 Vietnamese had orders of deportation. The Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC) estimates those numbers to have swelled to 9,000 today. Many Southeast Asians came to the United States as children, or fled to the U.S. as refugees, as part of the population who assisted the U.S. during the Vietnam War. Many face severe repercussions if they return to their country, and many who grew up in the U.S. since childhood do not speak the language or know the culture of their country of origin. SEARAC estimates that about 1/3 of long term detainees are Southeast Asian.

**Immigration reform that clears the visa backlogs and promotes family unity; addresses legalization of the undocumented; and restores due process to the immigration system, is crucial to our community.**

With respect, we have three requests:

1. First, that you write a letter urging President Obama and Senator Schumer to move ahead in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress with comprehensive immigration reform, and be one of the leaders who gets it passed. Thank you, Senator Cantwell, for already writing your letter to President Obama.
2. Second, that you to meet with a group of Asian Pacific American leaders within the next few weeks to discuss how comprehensive immigration reform affects our community.

3. Third, that you speak at a rally for immigration reform in Seattle on April 10. The rally is scheduled for noon at Occidental Park in Seattle's Pioneer Square, and 1,000 Asian Pacific Americans will be joining with several thousand others to push for comprehensive immigration reform in this Congress. A coalition called Washington Immigration Reform Coalition for America (WIRC for America) comprising over 50 labor unions, churches, and many community and immigrant and refugee groups, is sponsoring this rally together.

We thank you for the leadership you have already shown in advocating for our communities and we look to you again to demonstrate your strong support for the millions who struggle under a broken, unjust and inhumane immigration system.

Sincerely,

Diane Narasaki, Chair, King County Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, Executive Director, Asian Counseling & Referral Service

Lua Pritchard, Chair, Pierce County Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, President, Asian Pacific Cultural Ctr

Van Dinh Kuno, Chair, Snohomish County Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, Executive Director, Refugee and Immigrant Forum of Snohomish

Dori Peralta Baker, Chair, Yakima County Asian Pacific Islander Coalition

Vang Xiong, Chair, Spokane County Asian Pacific Islander Coalition

Alaric Bien, Chair, Asian Pacific Directors Coalition, Executive Director, Chinese Information & Service Ctr

Angelie Kim, Chair, Korean American Coalition

Debadutta Dash, Co-Chair, Washington State India Trade Relations Action Committee

Kelly Dang, President, Organization of Chinese Americans, Greater Seattle Chapter

Richard Gurtiza, President, Filipino American Political Action Group of Washington

Alma Kern, President, Filipino Community of Seattle

Sinoun Hem, President, Cambodian Women's Network

Tracy Lai, President, Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Puget Sound

Albert Shen, President, Shen Consulting

Ellen & Eddie Abellera, Co-Chairs, Multicultural Commission, St. Thomas More Parish

Linh Thai, General Secretary, Vietnamese Community of Seattle & Vicinity

Vu Le, Executive Director, Vietnamese Friendship Association

Minh Duc Nguyen, Executive Director, Helping Link

Peter Ansara, Executive Director, Korean Women's Association

Teresita Batayola, Executive Director, International Community Health Services

Art Cruz, Executive Director, Asian Pacific Cultural Center

Pran Wahi, Director, India Association of Western Washington

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