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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

“In Celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month”

MRS FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, I rise today to honor Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and to pay tribute to the struggles and enormous contributions of Asian Pacific Americans to our nation’s history and culture.

Each May since 1978, we have honored the rich heritage and countless achievements of the many Asian Pacific Americans in our country. The month of May was aptly chosen in order to commemorate both the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants in 1843, and also the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, which was constructed in large part by Chinese laborers.

“Freedom for All, a Nation We Call Our Own” is the theme for this year’s celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. This phrase beautifully encapsulates the great journey of Asian Pacific Americans to achieve the American dream and rings especially true during these uncertain times at home and abroad.

The men and women of our Armed Forces, many of whom are from the APA community, are proudly serving all over the world to secure our homeland. Currently, thousands of young Asian Pacific Americans are defending our country, joining the ranks of over 300,000 APA veterans who have served in the name of freedom.

One such veteran is my esteemed colleague, Senator Inouye of Hawaii, who began his career in public service during World War II where he served

in the Army’s 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The famed “Go for Broke” regiment of Japanese American soldiers courageously defended our country abroad even as their families endured unjust internment at home.

This is just one of the many achievements made by Asian Pacific Americans in the face of adversity. Despite discriminatory laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Alien Law Act of 1920, and the forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, Asian Pacific Americans have forged ahead to become a very successful and fast growing segment of American society.

Today, over 13 million Asian Pacific Americans reside in the United States. Whether through academics, technology, the arts, or business, the impact of the APA community is felt in virtually every aspect of our society.

The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that Asian Pacific American firms alone account for 2.2 million American jobs and generate over \$300 billion dollars in revenue. In California alone, Asian Pacific Americans own over 12 percent of all businesses, making them a significant force in the State’s economy.

Asian Pacific Americans are also gaining an increased presence in federal, state, and local governments. Throughout my career, I’ve had the distinct honor of working with many extraordinary Asian Pacific American leaders such as Senators Inouye and

Akaka of Hawaii, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, and Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao. Each of these public servants can function as an inspiration to all Americans.

But even as we celebrate these achievements, we must continue to address the struggles and hardships experienced by certain segments of the APA community.

In California, we have large populations of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders who have recently sought refuge in our country as a result of war and civil unrest. As these newcomers to America pursue their dreams and goals, we need to remember the challenges they face and stay vigilant against discrimination and hate.

That is why I believe one of the most significant contributions of Asian Pacific Americans to our nation is their role as our neighbors. America draws its strength from diversity. The presence of Asian Pacific Americans in our communities further adds to the vibrancy of the American landscape.

The strength of diversity is evident in my home state of California, where close to one-third of the entire Asian Pacific American population lives. One only needs to look at Los Angeles and San Francisco to see the rich kaleidoscope of cultures and traditions that Asian Pacific Americans have brought to their communities.

Places like Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Little Saigon and Koreatown are no longer isolated ethnic enclaves. As the APA community has spread and

grown, these historic neighborhoods have become vibrant centers of cultural exchange and learning.

As a former mayor and native of San Francisco, I can safely say that my hometown would not be the wonderfully vibrant, bustling city it is without the contributions of the Asian Pacific American community.

Finally Mr. President, Asian Pacific Americans played an important role as we built our country into what it is today. I am pleased to take this time today to honor the accomplishments of these remarkable Americans during this Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.