

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2021

Dear Colleague,

In recent months, Members of Congress of all backgrounds have spoken out, held events, and stood with the Asian American community in response to rising anti-Asian hate crimes, culminating in bipartisan support for the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act. This support has helped call attention to the problem of anti-Asian bigotry inspired by the Coronavirus pandemic. But there are other factors putting Asian Americans at risk today, in particular the rhetoric used to describe the People's Republic of China (PRC) that encourages xenophobia and racism against Chinese Americans and those perceived to be Chinese.

The rise of the PRC has presented a number of economic and national security challenges to the United States position on the world stage. And while we must speak out when the actions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) threaten American interests or values, we must also avoid xenophobic rhetoric that exacerbates the bigotry and racism facing Asian Americans. It is our responsibility as leaders to learn from history and ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

History has shown us that heightened xenophobic speech creates a cycle which leads to violence. Within two months of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, Executive Order 9066 was signed into law. The belief that Japanese Americans were untrustworthy and dangerous because of the conflict with Japan led to one of the darkest chapters in our country's history, the mass imprisonment of American citizens, including children, in prison camps. Again, in the 1980s, anti-Japanese sentiment fueled by economic competition and rising unemployment culminated in the brutal murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American man who was scapegoated by two unemployed autoworkers. In the aftermath of 9/11, hate crimes against South Asians, Sikh Americans, and American Muslims spiked dramatically - and have continued into the present day - due to faulty associations with the individuals who participated in the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Time and time again history has taught us the horrific impact xenophobic rhetoric can have on Asian Americans. This is reason enough to end the use of rhetoric that stokes hatred. But it is notable that this type of rhetoric isn't only dangerous to Asian Americans, it's harmful to the United States' long-term interests. Our country faces global security challenges such as climate change, supply chain disruption, and nuclear proliferation that require collaborative bi-lateral and multi-lateral solutions. Our leaders' use of xenophobic rhetoric undermines our ability to work with other countries to pursue those solutions.

As Members of the House of Representatives, we have an opportunity to model responsible rhetoric in the coming weeks as we consider legislation to bolster the U.S.'s position and

reinforce America's global leadership. This legislation will boost technology research and development and while revitalizing manufacturing sectors by making important investments in American science and technology. It will also hold bad governmental actors accountable. However, there are ways to talk about the merits of these pieces of legislation without increasing the risk of backlash against Asian Americans.

That is why we are issuing the following guidance on how to communicate publicly about concerns with China's leaders and investments in the United States economy without further endangering Asian Americans. This guidance is not to discourage criticism of the policies and actions of the CCP, but rather to encourage specific criticisms that do not paint Chinese people as threats to America.

As Members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), we have been grateful for your support as we stood up to anti-Asian hate during the pandemic and look forward to continuing in this effort with all of you.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Congressional Asian Pacific
American Caucus (CAPAC)



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Background on Messaging Guidance

- The spike in anti-Asian hate crimes since February 2020 shows how saying that “China” is responsible for COVID-19, or using phrases such as “Kung Flu” or “Chinese virus,” has led to misconceptions that all people of Chinese or Asian ancestry are to blame for the global pandemic.
- Chinese Americans and those perceived to be Chinese continue to face violence even as rising vaccination rates have decreased the threat of COVID-19 on day to day life. Some individuals may continue to blame the economic downturn on Asian Americans.
- While there are valid reasons to critique the policies and actions of the CCP, history has taught us that using vague and broad anti-China statements too often conflate people with a political party.
- When the language we use to refer to the actions of the CCP is not nuanced enough, or when we single out China for criticism even if other countries may be part of the problem as well, we run the risk of fueling a backlash against the entire Asian American community.
- It also hurts our ability to work collaboratively on non-military solutions with China and other Asian countries, which is necessary to address the global security challenges we face including climate change, supply chain disruption, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation.

| Messaging to Avoid Using | Alternative Messaging | Examples |
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| When speaking to the general public, in public settings, and in constituent communication, do not blame the Chinese people or Asian Americans for the virus. | Use the official names for the virus and refrain from using ethnic identifiers in describing the virus. | <i>Instead of:</i> “Chinese virus” <i>Say:</i> “COVID-19 virus; coronavirus; or SARS-CoV-2” |
| When speaking to the general public, in public settings, and in constituent communication, do not call out China as a whole when the bad actor is specifically the CCP. Do not falsely attribute these actions to Chinese nationals which includes the Chinese people and Chinese | Specify that the action was taken by the CCP or a specific Chinese leader and specify the action taken. | <i>Instead of:</i> “China is immoral” <i>Say:</i> “The CCP is guilty of human rights abuses against its own people” –this accurately highlights the Chinese government while acknowledging that the |

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| <p>American immigrants if the bad actor is the CCP.</p> | | <p>Chinese people are victims as well</p> |
| <p>While it is common to refer to the actions of a government by the name of the country, in the context of rising anti-Asian hate, doing so can stoke xenophobia and hate.</p> <p>This can be construed as implying that the Chinese people and Chinese Americans are enemies of the United States who seek to harm us.</p> | <p>When disagreeing with an action taken by China’s government, be as specific as possible, pointing to a particular policy or decision.</p> <p>If it is the case that multiple countries are a part of this problem, recognize that other countries pose threats to the U.S. as well, and it is not just China that should be held accountable.</p> | <p><i>Instead of:</i></p> <p>“China is threatening America by expanding into the South China Sea”</p> <p><i>say:</i></p> <p>“The CCP’s expansion into the South China Sea violates international law and the rights of China’s neighbors. The US must stand up for freedom of navigation and stand with our allies.”</p> |
| <p>Avoid language that evokes comparisons to war such as “enemy” when talking about economic investments. America is not enemies with billions of Chinese people, especially when many of them are customers of American businesses.</p> | <p>Emphasize the benefits of economic investments to the American people.</p> | <p><i>Instead of:</i></p> <p>“We need the Endless Frontiers Act to defeat our enemy China”</p> <p><i>Say:</i></p> <p>See the Biden Administration’s Statement of Administrative Policy on the Endless Frontiers Act which advocates for investment here without fear mongering or even mentioning China.</p> |