

## Claremont Congresswoman Judy Chu discusses anti-Asian rhetoric at 5C event

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### Body

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Claremont Congresswoman Judy Chu speaks during the U.S. Department of Agriculture Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Observance in 2013. (Courtesy: Lance Cheung)

Troubled by the recent spike in anti-Asian bigotry, Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., explained how the pandemic is stirring up anti-Asian bias and impacting the 2020 election at a 5C virtual event Wednesday night.

Chu, who represents Claremont, was the first Chinese American woman elected to Congress and has been serving since 2009. Chu currently serves as the chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

During the event, which was moderated by Scripps College politics professor Thomas Kim, Chu spoke of the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has on communities of color, including Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Asian Americans have experienced the second highest rate of death due to COVID-19 this year, behind Hispanic Americans. The number of Asian American deaths this year has been 35 percent higher than the historical average, while for white Americans it has only been 9 percent higher than average.

"I've made it my mission to ensure that [Asian and Pacific Islanders] are included in our federal COVID-19 response efforts in order to reduce these disproportionate disparities," Chu said.

However, with the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents reported in recent months, it's not just the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 that Chu is worried about, she said.

"I've been particularly troubled by the spike in anti-Asian bigotry and the xenophobia that we are seeing," she said. "It started in January with dirty looks and misinformation and has since escalated to spitting, yelling and physical attacks against Asian Americans all across the nation."

On Sept. 17, the U.S. House of Representatives passed Resolution 908, condemning terms such as "Chinese Virus," "Wuhan Virus" and "Kung-flu" for perpetuating anti-Asian prejudice. The measure also calls on public officials to denounce anti-Asian sentiments and for federal officials to quickly investigate hate incidents and prosecute violators.

The resolution passed with a 243-164 vote. Fourteen Republicans and all Democrats voted for the measure. At the event, Chu condemned the 164 Republicans who voted against the measure.

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Chu said the rhetoric of President Donald Trump and his followers, including Trump's reference to the pandemic as the "China plague" at the first debate, has incited anti-Asian bias.

"The xenophobia has only been exacerbated by President Donald Trump, who is trying to direct anger at China in order to deflect blame for his delayed and failed response to the coronavirus crisis," she said. "He does this even though health experts at the CDC and World Health Organization have repeatedly warned not to associate the disease with a specific geographic location or ethnicity due to the stigma it causes."

Chu discussed a recent study which showed that in the 12 hours following Trump's announcement that he tested positive for COVID-19, the rate of language associated with anti-Asian hostility rose by around 85 percent on Twitter.

"Donald Trump has built his career on conspiracy theories and racism, but now we have a clear picture of the harm his words can cause," she said.

Chu also said she has personally experienced Republicans using offensive terminology.

"Since the very beginning of this crisis, I and CAPAC have taken on President Trump and his followers every time they have used these harmful words," she said. "In fact, just yesterday, I was in a Ways and Means Committee hearing. One of the Republicans on the other side used the terminology again, and I confronted him right then and there."

Chu said she and CAPAC are committed to educating public officials on the damage caused by misinformation and xenophobic language.

"I hope that regardless of which candidates you support or what your political affiliation may be, that we can all agree that violent and hateful rhetoric and policies targeting Asian Americans at any time have no place in our society," Chu said.

She also urged viewers to vote this year and spoke specifically to Claremont Colleges students.

"I'm very, very proud of these very esteemed educational institutions that give my district so much prestige, but I'm especially happy that you do have this Asian American intercollegiate network," Chu said. "And it's very, very important to make sure that your voices are heard."

Professor Janelle Wong of the University of Maryland also spoke at the event, giving a presentation following Chu's speech in which she highlighted statistics regarding anti-Asian sentiments and discussed their effects on electoral politics in 2020.

"We've seen increasing evidence that there is a relationship between the rhetoric that we're hearing and people's ideas and opinions about Asian Americans," Wong said.

Wong added that she hopes the Asian American community will continue to unite with other communities of color to combat prejudice.

"Will the Asian American community also stand by other groups who also face racial discrimination, who have been facing police brutality and other forms of systemic discrimination?" Wong said. "For me, this particular moment really brings this choice for our community to the fore and reminds us how important it is, as Representative Chu said, to foster this united front against hate and discrimination."

The event was sponsored by the Pomona College Politics Department, the 5C American Studies program, the Intercollegiate Department of Asian American Studies and the Claremont McKenna College Berger Institute.

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