

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI
AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S
NATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER
HERITAGE MONTH EVENT**

WASHINGTON, DC

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Thank you, Under Secretary Kan, for the kind introduction, for your friendship over the years, and for your long and distinguished career in public service. And thank you to the U.S. Department of Transportation for the invitation to participate in this event—including Secretary Chao, whom I will introduce in a few minutes.

Every day when I drive into work, I cross a bridge that gives me a great view of Washington's grand monuments and buildings. Every day when I enter my office, I find fascinating issues to work on and an incredible opportunity to lead. And I marvel sometimes—how on earth did a shy Asian-American kid who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s in rural Kansas get the chance to be in this position?

It wouldn't have been this way but for my family. My late grandparents were from India. One of my grandfathers lost his father young and had to drop out of high school in order to work; another grandfather ran a small spare auto parts store; and one of my grandmothers never got to pursue her professional ambitions, despite being a brilliant woman with an incredible work ethic. But they all struggled and made sure that their children, my parents, got the education that would help them succeed.

And so my father and mother each went to medical school in the 1960s. In 1971, they came to the United States with little more than ten dollars, a transistor radio, and a willingness to work hard. They made that journey halfway around the world because they saw America as a land of promise, a place where they could go as far as their efforts and talents would take them. Shortly after I was born, my parents moved to Canada to continue their medical training. After a few years, they had a choice to make: Should they practice in the Great White North or in the United States?

This was an easy decision. They wanted to work in America. This country gave them a better chance to guide their own future, to build their own practice, and to treat patients without a looming government bureaucracy. Their choice reflected their values. They didn't come to the West hoping that government would give them a better life; they came here so they could build a better life for themselves.

To this day, my parents retain a healthy skepticism of government. For example, when I was informed by the White House in 2011 that the President intended to nominate me to serve on the Federal Communications Commission, I was honored and quite excited. But when I called home to share the good news, my mom's reaction wasn't what I expected. She didn't seem thrilled at the prospect of me leaving the private sector. She wanted to know whether being an FCC Commissioner was a part-time job. Did it pay? Could I still remain a partner at my law firm? Fifteen years after graduating from law school, thirty years after asking why I got a 95 on a test instead of 100, she was still worried that I might be coming back to live in my old bedroom in our Parsons, Kansas home. I suspect that my story, and my parents', has much in common with many other Asian-American families.

The Asian-American experience is as diverse as the continent of Asia itself. But I do think that there is something that unites us—it's our faith that this country gives us a better future. Let me close with a story that I think might illustrate the point. My local dry cleaner for many years was run by a Korean-American family. The family was always there—always working. The husband, in particular, was very business-like. He took your order, returned your clothes, and that was about it. Not much chit-chat. One day, I walked into the dry cleaner to pick up some clothes. I noticed he was wearing a new, dark blue jacket with a big, white "Y" on the front. I asked him why he was wearing the jacket. For the

first time I could recall, he broke into a big smile that somehow was as serious as it was joyful: “My daughter is going to Yale.”

I knew that smile, for I had seen it myself when I told my father in the spring of 1990 that I had been accepted at Harvard. I remember sensing in his reaction what I felt from the owner of the dry cleaner, even though neither said it: all those sacrifices, all those risks, all those long hours, all those times when it seemed uncertain whether the family would make it or not—it was all worth it for that moment when they finally could believe with confidence that they and their children were on the path to the American Dream. Korean or Indian, Lebanese or Lao, that smile reflects a universal desire that can be—and for so many has been—uniquely realized in this great country.

America gives us an unmatched chance to succeed. America gives us an unparalleled chance to ensure a better future for our children. America somehow enables us to preserve our Asian heritage while still making us fully American. America truly is a land of opportunity. I’m proud to call myself an American (and in particular an Asian-American). I hope others are too.

With that, it is my honor to introduce the Honorable Elaine Chao, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The Secretary is more than a leader and a visionary when it comes to transportation policy: She is a singular inspiration to me and many other Asian-Americans. I am grateful to her for her example and for the many courtesies she has extended to me during my time at the FCC.

You probably know the facts, but they are worth mentioning nonetheless. An immigrant who arrived in America at the age of eight speaking no English, Secretary Chao received her U.S. citizenship at the age of 19. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College and Harvard Business School. And she has had an incredible professional career in public service and the private sector: Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor, Director of the Peace Corps, Deputy Secretary at the U.S. Department of Transportation, Chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission, Deputy Maritime Administrator, White House Fellow, and important positions at BankAmerica Capital Markets Group and Citicorp.

Here are some facts you may not know. Like me, Secretary Chao is the eldest sibling—in her case—the eldest of six daughters. Like me, Secretary Chao is the child of a physician—and did not become one. But unlike me, Secretary Chao was born on March 26. That makes her an Aries. According to the Internet website horoscope.com, “Aries are the trailblazers. Passionate and independent, Aries will never do something just because everyone else is doing it—a Ram needs to be 100% committed to the task at hand.” That certainly describes the Secretary well. The website goes on to say that “[t]hose who are drawn to magnetic Aries may have trouble keeping up—but if they can, they’ll have a friend for life.”

Madame Secretary, I freely admit that I’ll never be able to keep up with you, but I do hope I can call you a friend nonetheless. I humbly turn the floor over to you.