

Obama has come to Asian Americans' aid

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Spending this week in Miami, it's become crystal clear to me that Florida's Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) vote is, and will be, the margin of victory in this year's presidential election and the critical vote to reelect President Obama and move this country forward.

AAPIs of the Sunshine State are a microcosm of the colors of this country. Ranking eighth in the country in population size, Florida's AAPI community grew at a rate of 72 percent between 2000 and 2010. Despite our community's impressive growth, growing faster than any other racial group, only 55 percent of America's AAPIs are registered to vote and one-third of AAPI voters remain undecided.

Speaking as an AAPI member of the US Congress, there is no question that President Obama is our first AAPI president. He's Asian in his upbringing and spent his formative years in Indonesia. One cannot come out of Hawaii and not have an Asian approach to things. In fact, the President's family is filled with AAPIs: his half-sister Maya, his brother-in-law Konrad, and his nieces Suhaila and Savita. When he fights for AAPIs, he is fighting for his family and ours.

It makes sense why AAPIs would vote for Obama, and why in the 2008 election — even at 3 percent of the population — Floridian AAPIs gave Obama a 2.5 percentage margin of victory. On the economy and job growth, healthcare and education, the records demonstrate the President's winning results for AAPIs.

On the economy and job growth, President Obama understands that to build a strong America, we need to build from the middle class out. He also understands that for AAPIs, businesses support the community, as much as it sustains the family unit. That's why he awarded \$7 billion in loans to AAPI small businesses; enacted 18 small business tax cuts; and increased job and career training opportunities for AAPIs through Workforce Investment Act programs.

Be they nail salons, restaurants, or advocacy professions, there are over 1.5 million AAPI owned firms in the nation — accounting for more than 2.8 million employed workers. In 2008, Florida's AAPIs buying power was almost \$16 billion — outpacing the growth of any other ethnic group's buying power.

On healthcare, President Obama passed health reform that addressed health disparities and inequities, such as diabetes and hepatitis B, which disproportionately affect AAPIs. He protected nearly three million AAPIs through expanded health insurance coverage, including the nearly 100,000 AAPI youth who gained coverage through their parents' health insurance. In 2016, another 2 out of 2.5 million AAPIs who would otherwise be uninsured will gain or be eligible for coverage.

On education, President Obama rejected the "model minority" myth and invested \$50 million over the next decade in Asian American Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions — institutions that serve nearly half of all AAPI undergraduates. He also improved Head Start, which helps an estimated 28,500 AAPI children gain access to early childhood education.

We cannot afford to be stripped of those hard-fought provisions and solutions secured by President Obama. We cannot afford to revert back to the Bush-Cheney trickle down policies, which the Romney-Ryan plan mirrors.

President Obama knows our country is strongest, and at its best, when everyone has a seat at the table. That's why he signed an Executive Order to re-establish the White House Initiative on AAPIs and the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs, and appointed more AAPIs to federal office and judicial seats than any other President in history.

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In 2008, AAPIs were the crucial coalition in Florida -- voting for President Obama over Sen. McCain 47 to 24 percent. Recent reports by the National Asian American Survey and Lake Research Partners illustrate that AAPIs have a significantly higher approval of President Obama — at 10 points higher than the national average.

If this autumn's election turnout parallels that of four years ago, Floridian AAPIs can give President Obama a 38 point lead or a 33,000 vote margin of victory over Romney. While four out of five AAPIs in Florida are planning to vote, over 10 percent remain undecided. In this election, for the sake of our family, our businesses, our community, we cannot afford to overlook a single unregistered and undecided AAPI voter.

From the ethnic language schools to the gurdwaras, from the AAPI lions clubs and student unions, I stand by Florida's AAPI efforts to reach out to the 10 percent undecided. To the generations who came before us and to the generations to come, we have an obligation to get out the vote.

The story of our community — the story of our nation — has always been to seize the moment, to take that leap forward, to cross the expanse of that ocean, and to forge a more perfect union. On November 6th, I urge Florida's AAPI family to once again, forge this union with President Obama.

Michael Honda, U.S. representative, 15th congressional district, San Jose, Calif.

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