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How Nevada's Asian American vote can swing election

By Rep. Michael Honda (D-Calif.) - 10/26/12 03:30 PM ET

The Nevadan Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) vote is, and will be, the margin of victory in this year's presidential election and the critical vote to re-elect President Obama and move this country forward.

AAPIs of the Silver State are a microcosm of the colors and energy of this country. Even as AAPIs grew the fastest out of all ethnicities -- growing 46 percent from 2000 to 2010 nationally -- Nevada's AAPI community grew at an astounding rate of 116 percent and now comprises 9 percent of the state. Despite our community's impressive growth, however, only 55 percent of AAPIs are registered to vote nationally and one-third of AAPI voters remain undecided.

Speaking as an AAPI member of the U.S. Congress, there is no question that President Obama is our first AAPI president. He's Asian in his upbringing and spent some formative years in Indonesia. One cannot be born and raised in 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, 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 -- this community gave Obama a 62 to 35 percent victory over Sen. McCain. On 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 \$9 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.

There are over 1.5 million AAPI owned firms in the nation -- accounting for more than 2.8 million employed workers. Be they banks or bakeries, restaurants or seafood markets, Nevada's 17,500 AAPI owned firms had sales and receipts of \$3.8 billion and employed almost 24,000 people in 2007.

On healthcare, President Obama passed health reform that addressed health care disparities and inequities, such as diabetes and hepatitis B, which disproportionately affect AAPIs. He protected nearly 3 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 which 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 Barack 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.

In 2008, AAPIs were the crucial coalition in Nevada -- voting for President Obama over Sen. McCain 63 to 19 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, Nevadan AAPIs can give President Obama a 25 point lead or a 9,000 vote margin of victory over Romney. While almost four out of five AAPIs in Nevada are planning to vote, one in six 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 Little Manila to Chinatown Plaza, from the ethnic supermarkets to the language schools, I stand by the Nevadan AAPIs' efforts to reach out to the one in six 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 the Nevadan AAPI family to once again, forge this union with President Barack Obama.

Honda represents the Silicon Valley and serves on the House Budget and Appropriations committees.

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