

FEATURE

A Speech by Governor Gary Locke

of the State of Washington at the Committee of 100 13th Annual Conference

April 2, 2004

Thanks Charlie. Good evening. I am honored to be here, and truly honored by this award. **First**, let me add my congratulations to tonight's honorees: Pacific Time, Cyrus Tang and the Tang Foundations, Dr. David Ho and Jerry Yang. To Dr. Ho and Jerry, you are giants in your fields. Your work has been revolutionary and transformed the lives of millions of people around the world. I am deeply humbled to even share this evening with you. **Second**, it's been a great honor serving as governor of the great State of Washington. It's an honor to have been the first Chinese-American governor in U.S. history, and the first Asian American governor on the mainland. Mona and I thank so many of you here, and Asian Americans across the U.S. for supporting us, believing in us and helping us make history. By being a good, respected governor, I hope I've encouraged more Asian Americans to run for office and made it possible for them to win!

Standing here tonight, in the presence of so many luminaries of today and tomorrow, I am very proud to be a Chinese-American. I am proud of the contributions the Chinese have made to civilization over thousands of years, from the arts and architecture to the philosophies and religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. I am proud of the countless inventions and innovations, including the abacus and the seismograph, silk and cast iron, the compass and the clock, gunpowder and fireworks, paper and the printing press, acupuncture and herbal medicine. Proud of the countless achievements advancing technology and science. And proudest of all, perhaps, of the timeless values of family, honor and respect that are so central to Chinese culture. And I'm proud that here in America, the Chinese have continued this legacy of advancing civilization.

Six Chinese-Americans are Nobel laureates in physics and chemistry. The ongoing legacy includes **Professor Wang Ying-lai**, a pioneer in insulin synthesis, and Dr. Ho - our honoree tonight - at the forefront in the fight against AIDS. From **An Wang's** remarkable contributions in computer technology to **Jerry Yang's** development of Yahoo!, the most trafficked Web site on the planet: our legacy continues! We see it in the great architectural achievements of **I.M. Pei**. We feel it in **Maya Lin's** profoundly moving design of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Our proud legacy sings in the music of cellist, **Yo-Yo Ma**, and glides gracefully on the ice with **Michelle Kwan**. Together, we have come a long way. We each have different stories, but we have all traveled the same journey.

My family's journey began when my grandfather came to the U.S. from China as a teenager more than 100 years ago. He worked as a servant for a family in exchange for English lessons. Today I live in the Governor's mansion—just one mile from the house where my grandfather swept floors, cooked and washed dishes. We joke that it took our family 100 years to travel one mile. So, you in L.A., don't think the traffic is that bad! Our journey has been one of hard work and hope. And this is the journey of all Chinese American families... a journey of hard work and hope - sustained by a belief in the promise of America: freedom, equality and opportunity.

Our families began this journey as immigrants. The Chinese helped build the railroads, worked in the gold mines, logged the forests for the wood that became cities and towns, fanned the land to feed the nation, and fought in world wars to keep America safe and free.

Because our ancestors gave their blood, sweat and tears to build and defend this prosperous America, we have every right - indeed a responsibility - to be active politically and to help set the policies that affect this country and our people.

The early Chinese immigrants were the hardworking backbone of prosperity and progress. There was discrimination, injustice and little sharing in that early prosperity and progress. But we pressed on. And we have traveled far in our journey. By daring to try and by persevering to succeed, we have paved the way for others to travel the same journey. And to go even farther. We have shown that we can challenge the glass ceiling through political involvement and empowerment, and through excellence in the arts, sciences, business, technology and government. We can challenge the glass ceiling. And we can shatter it!

We still have a ways to go on this journey. Three years ago, the Committee announced the results of a landmark national survey on American attitudes towards Chinese Americans and Asian Americans. The results were startling. They showed that 25% of Americans hold strong negative attitudes towards Chinese Americans, and still believe in damaging stereotypes. The survey showed that too many people think of Chinese Americans and Asian Americans as "separate," and not equal. The survey showed that 46% of Americans believe our country has a problem with Chinese Americans passing secret information to the Chinese government.

We saw this prejudice work against **Dr. Wen Ho Lee**, who was accused of spying for China in 1999. Dr. Lee languished for **9 months** in solitary confinement before he was exonerated and a federal judge apologized on behalf of the American government. Most recently, U.S. Army Captain **James J. Yee**, a Muslim chaplain who was ministering to Muslim prisoners of war, was accused of being part of an espionage ring. He

spent **76 days** in a military brig, much of the time in leg irons. Prosecutors were thinking of seeking the death penalty. All charges were finally dropped two weeks ago and he has been returned to duty. Captain Yee's ordeal is further proof that we must always be energetically vigilant about equal rights and liberty.

Clearly, injustices and discrimination persist. That is why the work of the Committee of 100 remains critically important. It was not that long ago that the Alien Land Law made it illegal for non-citizens, including Chinese, to own land. We must never become complacent. We must remain constantly vigilant against injustice. And that has never been more important than it is right now, today. Today, those who question our government's policies are criticized for being "unpatriotic" by people who have forgotten what democracy means.

We must stand together and raise our voices, loud and proud. Having faced hardships and discrimination in the past, Asian Americans must make it crystal clear that we will never abdicate our basic freedoms. We will never tolerate injustices and discrimination against Chinese Americans - or any Americans.

America is a land of immigrants - whether first generation or 10th generation. Our diversity of people, cultures and religions is the source of our nation's strength, ingenuity and amazing progress. When our society embraces its rich diversity, we reach for the highest, best potential of civilization and each of its people.

We must always work toward such a society, and such a world. A world with no glass ceilings, and with ample opportunities for all. For us, for our children, and for generations to come. I look forward to continuing our journey together toward such a world of freedom, equality and opportunity. And I thank the Committee of 100 for its steadfast leadership in guiding us on this exciting and important quest.