

EVENT

Community Hearing: Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Presented by Bettie Sing Luke, OCA-GS, Organization of Chinese Americans of Greater Seattle At St. Luke's Community Center, Bellingham, Washington, on Tuesday, August 16, 2006

Good evening. My name is Bettie Luke and I work for OCA-GS – Organization of Chinese Americans, Greater Seattle Chapter. We are a PanAsian American civil rights group.

I also volunteer for the Wing Luke Asian Museum, the only PanAsian American museum in the United States and is an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Museum.

I want to address the historic context of immigration and will speak on three points.

Point One:

In the earliest immigration to what we know as the United States — when the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, they had neither green cards or permission to land by the Native Indigenous People who were here. Following waves of immigrants from Europe wrote laws in their own image, declared imminent domain, appropriated land and wrote treaties which were not honored. The affects of that are still felt today.

In contrast, I want to applaud Governor Christine Gregoire for a rare show of respect for the American Indians in the state of Washington. Last week, she handed over 11 acres of land to the Lower Elwha Klallum people for disturbing their burial grounds of over 340 ancestors, during a Port project three years ago.

I call upon the ancestors of the early European immigrants and those who came after — to remember the role of European immigrant forefathers and act as respectfully as our Governor does.

Point Two:

The European immigrants early on – wrote laws seizing control for their own people and enacted laws which severely practiced racial profiling – whether Vigilante Law or official Governmental Laws. A glaring example of racial profiling is pouring effort into securing the Mexican border, but nothing on the East coast, where the largest number of Visa-overstays are Irish. I am not suggesting a witch-hunt for Irish – just calling attention to the vast difference by race.

Historic examples of racial targeting include:

- Slavery
- Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII
- Anti-miscegenation laws
- Sikhs being driven out of Bellingham
- Citizenship and Alien Land Laws
- Exclusion Laws against the Chinese 1882- (1943) 1965

I want to especially talk about the Chinese Exclusion Laws. In 1882, the Chinese were the first and only people excluded by US Law, from coming to the United States – even though these laws were unconstitutional and counter to the Bill of Rights. So we have to be very careful when we hear the words, “It is the LAW.

The affects of the Chinese Exclusion Laws are still felt in the Chinese American communities today.

The exclusion of Chinese was renewed with variations until WWII when the US wanted China as an ally. The Senators in the State of Washington – Jackson and Magnuson, led the efforts to revoke the Exclusion Laws.

But the result was a limit of 103 Chinese allowed each year in comparison to 25,000 from most European countries (and unlimited from England.)

Those who supported these unconstitutional laws against Chinese immigration did not see the value and talent of the Chinese immigrants.

CASE in point:

My mother and oldest brother, Wing Luke, came to the United States under a provision in the Exclusion Laws in 1931.

- My brother was not yet a citizen — when he fought for the US Army during WWII,

During the War, he had to come home on furlough to relocate the family Hand Laundry when the landlady evicted us by tripling the rent. She said “We are at war with those people and I can’t tell them apart.”

Wing came home from the Army, became a citizen, became an attorney and fought for Indian Fishing Rights, Open Housing, equal land and citizenship rights.

He was elected to Seattle’s City Council – the first person of Asian ancestry to be elected to public office on the West Coast and in the Northwest. Wing worked for the betterment of life for the whole community. He supported historic preservation of Pioneer Square, Pike Place Market and the waterfront.

The Wing Luke Asian Museum was built in memory of him and for 30 years has educated hundreds of thousands of students and adults of all cultures and continues to be an educational and cultural landmark in the country.

I cite Wing Luke’s story because I believe there are other immigrant success stories among our existing immigrant population in the United States.

We need to capture the talent, skills, minds, hearts and language of these folks who are a rich resource to our society.

Which brings me to my 3rd and last point.

Point three:

It is NOT Un-American to speak more than one language.

(Statement in Chinese - My Chinese name is Luke Mhee Foohng.)

While some states are poised to enforce “English Only “ laws, the US Government is offering scholarships to those who are willing to take courses to learn Arabic and Chinese languages! We need more global language skills to get along.

CASE in point:

I was part of a group of citizens from Eugene, Oregon visiting China in 1999. One member of our group was a State Legislator. We were treated like VIPs at this city in China, which was an economic zone. These zones are given millions of dollars to attract and establish businesses from around the world. We were met at the city gates and escorted with fanfare through the city to the great hall.

The Mayor of this town of 2 million people spoke about the possibilities of joining their city of economic enterprises – which already included car manufacturing and food companies from around the world. The Mayor escorted us around to key sites. However, the Oregon Legislator was the proverbial “Bull in the China Shop” with his behavior and words! I am sure the Oregon files had a red flag because of his behavior.

The success story came 6 years later. A Chinese relative, who came to Oregon as a

teenager, got a degree in Business and he is now working for the State of Oregon, escorting agricultural tours to China. His knowledge of contacts, culture and language is not something that can be taught in books.

This is a clear case where language, cultural practices and expectations, nuances of diplomacy and most of all – LANGUAGE transcend economic and political issues when dealing with global countries.

We need to enact immigration reform that includes citizenship and family unification to bind the loyalties of the families to this country. We need to educate and capitalize on the language and cultural skills of the young people – who potentially are poised as the secret power of commerce and diplomacy for the US in the global world over the next few decades.

IN SUMMARY

- 1) Early European immigrants interpreted laws in their own image and we must not let that continue today
- 2) Immigration and other US laws must not reflect racial profiling – unfairly targeting people of color.
- 3) Current immigrants in the US are a vast pool of talent, cultural knowledge, language, insights and skills that this country needs.



The future economic and political power of the US is dependent on tapping into and judiciously using this resource. This can be addressed with the initial step of Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Thank you, B. L.

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Bettie Sing Luke works as the Office and Project Manager for OCA-GS ?Organization of Chinese Americans of Greater Seattle. She also volunteers for community projects, including the Wing Luke Asian Museum, the Rainbow Bookfest of the Northwest Asian Weekly Foundation, Asian Pacific Islander Coalition and Immigration Reform Coalition. Bettie Luke has spent most her career as a Multicultural Trainer & Equity Specialist. Involved with Multicultural Education and Teacher Inservice Training for 30 years, she conducted Diversity training in 35 different states. She worked 11 years for the Eugene 4J Schools, supporting the District goal to reduce the Achievement

Gap Ms. Luke conducts Cultural Competency training and advising in both educational and business sectors. Her professional experience encompasses K-12, Higher Education as well as government and business settings, building bridges with agencies between various Multicultural and Asian American community organizations. Bettie Luke is also an artist, co-author of 2 Chinese Activity Books for Children and a community activist. She serves on many Diversity Committees related to education, at the local, state and national levels. Ms. Luke was certified as a trainer in 2000 for the NEA MLTC — Minority Leadership Training Cadre for the National Educators Association. Recent training included Oregon, California, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Washington DC and Hawaii.