

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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Sandy Chu ([00:22](#)):

On behalf of Greenberg Traurig in the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, also known as NAPABA, welcome and good afternoon. We are thrilled to be presenting a timely panel, entitled Courageous Conversations, The Rise of anti-Asian Sentiment and How to Impact Change. This program is part of an ongoing Greenberg Traurig courageous conversation series that addresses equal rights and racial and social justice. This event is also NAPABA's capstone event of NAPABA's Lobby Day. My name is Sandy Chu and I'm an Intellectual Property Attorney at Greenberg Traurig in the New York office. And the immediate past president of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of South Florida. I am absolutely delighted and excited to be here to present today's program during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. As an Asian American, I have witnessed hostilities in horrific acts of violence directed at my community. Largely stemming from the false scapegoating of Asian Americans as somehow responsible for the pandemic.

Sandy Chu ([01:21](#)):

The nonprofit Stop AAPI Hate reports that as of March, 2020, there have been over 6,600 self-reported hate incidents. Just Monday, I saw the news of another attack, a 35-year old Asian American man pushed onto the tracks in Long Island City, New York, where I live in a station that I use. The firm's Asian Affinity Group saw the need to do something. As an international firm, we're diverse in nature and our colleagues have been horrified in targets of anti-Asian hostilities. We saw the courageous conversation series as a perfect platform to have a dialogue to explore what's happening and what we can do. We're honored to present this program in collaboration with NAPABA. NAPABA represents the interest of over 60,000 Asian American lawyers alone, as well as judges, legal scholars, law students, and other legal professionals. NAPABA serves as a national voice for the Asian American legal profession with nearly 90 affiliates across the US.

Sandy Chu ([02:19](#)):

NAPABA has been in the forefront addressing the surge in hate crimes and hate incidents. And they're collecting hate crime data and providing pro bono services to victims. Our program brings together exceptional leaders in public service while been instrumental in addressing the rise of hate nationally. President Biden sign the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, which was introduced in the house by our special guests, US Congresswoman Grace Meng. She's serving her fifth term in the US House of Representatives. She represents the sixth congressional district of New York encompassing Queens. She's the first and only Asian American member of Congress from New York state. Congresswoman Meng is a member of the House Appropriations Committee and is Vice Chair of its subcommittee on state and foreign operations. She sits on the subcommittee on commerce, justice, science and related agencies, and the Health Ethics committee. Among others Congresswoman Meng has passed several pieces of legislation into law, including the recent COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act striking the word Oriental from federal law and laws about religious freedom, and among other laws.

Sandy Chu ([03:31](#)):

Prior to Congress, she was a member of the New York State Assembly. And prior to that, she worked as a Public Interest Lawyer. Our second speaker is A.B. Cruz III, who is the current president of NAPABA. A.B. has helped to lead four public and three private companies through change challenge crisis. He has served as general counsel for many companies most recently at USAA and before that Emergent BioSolutions. He has also served concurrently as a GC of E.W. Scripps company and a Deputy Director of Operations for the United States Fleet Forces Command. A.B. is a former Navy Admiral who during his 33 plus year career shaped and led high performing operational teams in demanding and high stress environments. And represented the US internationally in multiple high level engagements. He's a visionary leader in the highest and of highest character who has developed and implemented many value and brand building initiatives.

Sandy Chu ([04:34](#)):

In recognition of the upcoming Memorial day, we would like to honor and thank A.B. and our military service members, including more than 300,000 Asian Americans who have served in the US military since the War of 1812. Thank you for your service. Lastly, it is my honor to introduce Chinh Pham, our moderator for today's discussion. Chinh is a shareholder in our Boston office and the Co-chair of our Asian Affinity group. He advises technology clients on the creation development and exploitation of intellectual property rights. In addition, Chinh serves as a mentor to startups and advises student entrepreneurs on their business ventures and a great mentor to me. Chinh has been recognized as a technology law trailblazer, pop emerging tech lawyer, and has been honored as an outstanding 50 Asian Americans in business. And now I turn the floor over to Chinh and our distinguished guests.

Chinh Pham ([05:32](#)):

Thank you, Sandy. And thank you everyone for joining us today for our courageous conversation. And thank you to both of our esteemed speakers US Congresswoman Grace Meng, and the president of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, AB Cruz III for joining us today. I would like to focus on for our conversation over the course of the next 30 minutes or so. It will be focusing briefly on the history of racism against AAPIs in the US. Each of our panelists has personal experience as Asian American and particular their journey to public service. And then finally spend the bulk of our discussion, hopefully, on how we can impact change to stem the tide against the anti-Asian sentiment that we're witnessing.

Chinh Pham ([06:18](#)):

But let me start off by noting that in the face of rising anti-Asian violence, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We are seeing the AAPI community stepping up our efforts. At not only the local state, but the national level to combat the rise in violence in crime against the Asian Americans. And from local groups like the Asian Safety Squad in Minneapolis, where one of our own shareholders, Alex Kim is deeply involved through a state crime bill, such as the Hate Crime Bill being introduced by Massachusetts State Representative Chum Wen and to the COVID-19 Hate Crime Bill introduced by our panelist, Congresswoman Grace Meng and great news that it was signed into law by President Biden last Thursday. A big win for the AAPI community.

Chinh Pham ([07:06](#)):

We're seeing many of our AAPI colleagues stepping up and no longer staying silent as perhaps we may have seen in the previous generation, when it comes to racist acts against the AAPI community. But really what has brought us to this point the AAPI community in the US, as we all know, is rich and

diverse in culture, viewpoints and level of success. We're not monolithic as a group and have added so much to the success of this country. As my colleague Prashanth Gurunath commented on a panel, "We are your doctor, your lawyer, your tech innovator. So why is it that we're seeing so much hate against the AAPI community?" So to begin our conversation, perhaps we can start off with the first question. Can you talk briefly about the COVID-19 Bill and what impact you would like to see set in motion? What are your thoughts on the bill being signed at the law by President Biden? As I said, it's a big win. It's a big win.

A.B. Cruz III ([08:12](#)):

It is. Well, first of all, Chinh, thank you so much. Thank you, Sandy, for the warm introduction .and thank you to your firm and your colleagues and your affinity group for in inviting me, I am deeply honored to be on this panel, especially in the triumphant wake of the passage and the signing, enactment of COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act. Which obviously our esteemed special guests, Congresswoman Grace Meng brought to the floor, but it's also I'm a big sports fan. So in a rare moment that legislation, it was a true bipartisan effort. In the Senate, 94 to 1. In the House 364 to 62. That is outstanding. It's a rare sighting in Washington, DC. And I give great credit and all the credit. And it was so nice to watch Congresswoman Meng and Senator Hirono and Congresswoman Chu standing as the president signed that legislation in. I think I saw Congresswoman Meng pop on. So I this this is her victory, our victory. But she's the best one to tell the story I'll chime in later with with more accolades for her and her effort.

Chinh Pham ([09:52](#)):

No. Thank you A.B. Congresswoman Meng if you're on as a first question for the panel, we're just thrilled that the bill that you introduced, the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Bill was signed the law by President Biden. If you could share with us a brief history of that, as well as what you would like to see in terms of what the bill can can impact as we go forward.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([10:23](#)):

Sure. Well, thank you so much for having me. It's such a privilege to be here with you. But you know what's interesting is that this piece of legislation was actually introduced May of 2020 and there wasn't a lot of interest in it. I had to work really hard just to get even a few co-sponsors. People weren't really paying attention. But I will say that unfortunately after we saw increased numbers of incidents against our elderly across the country and the murders that happened in Atlanta, Georgia, people were really interested and the dynamics just changed immediately almost. And this legislation moved, especially in relation for Congress' usual pace, moved pretty quickly. And even when it was going through the Senate and I have to give, of course the bill sponsor, Senator Hirono credit. And of course, Senator Schumer, our majority leader, who literally I watched him work relentlessly on this piece of legislation.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([11:40](#)):

And I hope you all tell him I said nice things about him. When you see him. Hours before the bill was to be voted on. We didn't even know if we could get the 60 votes that we would likely need. And then by the time the bill passed, we found out it was 94 to 1. And we were just really shocked to be honest. But that's fine. Sometimes you just take the victory and don't ask too many questions. And then obviously it passed the House. And then president Biden had expressed since truly day one, that he was going to sign the legislation. So we were thrilled that it got signed into law and that the administration was so focused on trying to take some action and help the community, help what's going on, not just in words, but in real action as well.

Chinh Pham ([12:38](#)):

That's fantastic. A.B. I don't know if you want to add any comments or...

A.B. Cruz III ([12:43](#)):

Yeah, Congresswoman Meng, it's great to see ya and congratulations. Again, we are all very proud as a community with the events that unfolded, you're right, relatively quickly and astoundingly for that matter. We at NAPABA want to make sure that it has robust meaning and impact and in law. So this is when the hard work must continue. And so we are certainly working to support the new law. And in turn the law requires DOJ and HHS, as to issue guidance, aim at raising awareness of hate crimes during COVID-19 pandemic. NAPABA is already working diligently here in this area to combat hate crimes. We have a toolkit that's translated in 25 AANHPI languages.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([13:43](#)):

Wow.

A.B. Cruz III ([13:43](#)):

It's on our resource page, and it's a valuable tool. We've had lobby day all this week. And we've been sharing this information with each congressional office that we're meeting. So that they can, in turn, pass this along as a resource to their constituents. The law also provides grants to state and local law enforcement to help them better identify and classify hate crimes. NAPABA is all over this as well by helping the public better identify and report hate crimes. So we aim to give robust meaning to the law, that law in particular. So again, congratulations.

Chinh Pham ([14:30](#)):

Thank you A.B.. And I just wanted to take a step back now. The bill certainly is timely, and then certainly there's going to be a lot of work going forward for us all and us as a community. But let's examine what even led us to this point where you even have to introduce the legislation. And so I know that you guys had shared with me your thoughts on really the background in history of racism against API and our community. And so I wanted to perhaps get your thoughts, both of you. And perhaps you can share with us your perspective on the background of the history and of racism in the US. Perhaps we can start with, with Congresswoman Meng first.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([15:29](#)):

I think that has been tough on the Asian American community, obviously dealing with the pandemic. But also increased incidents of bigotry. And early on when the former president was using terms like Kung flu and Chinese virus, we kind of saw this coming. And we knew that it would or could end up to what we're seeing these days. And the worst case scenario was something like what happened in Atlanta, Georgia. So organizations across the country. And I want to thank A.B. and NAPABA for taking such a leadership role on this issue nationwide. Just really saw this coming and it's just been heartbreaking. But we really felt like the mainstream community wasn't really paying attention to this. It really felt like we were screaming into a big black hole. And so not until recent months, did we really start seeing more people focus on this.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([16:39](#)):

And so last year even, I proposed a symbolic resolution that costs no money, had no teeth. All it said was Congress stood United and condemning bigotry towards Asians, and it passed. But 164 members voted against it, against this symbolic resolution. And we really wanted to push through some legislation with more teeth, and I'm thrilled to hear NAPABA and working with the appropriate stakeholders and how we're going to implement that. Because that really is even more important. And we have a lot of work to do on the front end. This legislation is helpful and an important step and provides accountability and statistics and resources. But it's after the fact, comes at the back end of this problem. There's a lot of work we have to do on the front end as well.

Chinh Pham ([17:32](#)):

No, thank you.

A.B. Cruz III ([17:34](#)):

Should I just continue?

Chinh Pham ([17:36](#)):

Yes, please.

A.B. Cruz III ([17:36](#)):

Okay. Yeah. Congresswoman Meng is correct. This has come to the forefront mostly because it's on social media and finally the mainstream media picked up on this. But I will tell ya and most of us certainly know discrimination against anti-Asian American hatred and discrimination and bias has existed for years and years and years. And in recent months, or especially this special month, we've certainly been asked a lot of questions for the first time asking about the history of racism against Asians in this country. And so I've spent time highlighting the low moments of some of our low moments as a country. But let me start with this because we're going to talk about service. But right at the outset, against the backdrop of these low moments, I think it's important to realize that like for instance, in the service of this country in uniform, we've had Asians fighting next to and side by side with US soldiers since the War of 1812, which was mentioned at the outside.

A.B. Cruz III ([18:54](#)):

I'm so glad it was mentioned. But in every war after that, in fact the War of 1812, the Battle of New Orleans featured Filipinos fighting for General Jackson. And the history of that service continues all the way through our history, every war, Civil War, World War I, World War II and even in modern time. So I want to highlight the fact that there's been shoulder to shoulder working together on that. Now the bad side of the the anti-Asian history is also long and deep. And it dates back. I think it was the mid-1800s, where, I think it was in LA, the parts of the Chinatowns there were burned down soon after that the Page Act was enacted, which prevented Chinese women from immigrating and coming to this country.

A.B. Cruz III ([19:59](#)):

And it was for reasons that I don't even like to talk about here, of course, the Chinese Exclusion Act followed that. And I think the Geary Act extended the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prevented Chinese immigrants to come in. And it also, I think, required them to carry registration cards and so forth. Fast forward to World War II in the wake of Pearl Harbor. We had what 120,000, I think it was, Japanese, many of them Americans, interred for as long as four years while maybe some of their family members were fighting side by side. The 442 Regiment comes to mind. So unfortunately this hate and bias and

discrimination is deeply rooted in our history. And you don't hear about it because they don't teach this in schools. And frankly it took me to have to really purposefully intentionally go back and learn this. Because these are defining moments and certainly lessons learned hopefully for our country moving forward.

Chinh Pham ([21:11](#)):

Oh, absolutely. It's certainly an important history for the US. Yeah. But one in which I believe we must acknowledge, as you said A.B., as a country in order to avoid making the same mistakes going forward. So as I said in the interest of time, perhaps what I can do is ask a few other questions to A.B. and to Congresswoman Meng. And then perhaps you guys can weave into your response, what the pathway that led you to public service, to the extent that you can do that. Because I think that we want to get to some of these questions in terms of how, or what we must do in light of the recent passing of Grace Meng's bill there, what we need to do in order to address some some of that violence that we're seeing against the Asian community.

Chinh Pham ([22:10](#)):

So in addition to the COVID-19 Crimes Bill, Congresswoman Meng, I know that you've introduced other legislation initiatives in your time in the House of Representative there. And as I said here, hate can originate from so many sources. And the anti-Asian rhetoric that we're seeing has increased significantly over the last few years. Seems to me that we must also address the root cause of the anti-Asian hate and violence. So I know that you've put forth rare solicitation, as I said, such as the language equity, anti-Asian rhetoric teaching of AAPI history to school to combat racism against AAPI community. So can you talk to us about some of these other legislation that you have put forth?

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([23:13](#)):

Sure. So look, as thrilled as I am about the legislation getting signed into law, I'm fully aware that is only one small puzzle piece of the solution. We still have so much work to do ahead of us. I also believe that we are at an inflection point. This is a really important time in history. My fear is, and I hope I'm wrong, is that we only have a short runway of people caring about the community and making sure that we are taking advantage of every single moment to get more work done. And so two other things that I think is important. One is to provide more equitable funding for our community and whether that is funding from different levels of government. So for example, in New York City, Asians are over 15% of the population, but we get less than 1% of government funding to groups that serve our communities. To corporate giving, to philanthropic efforts, to research in areas like health to polling.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([24:26](#)):

We need to make sure that we are not invisible in these spaces and that our community is getting more resources. And these groups have really been on the front lines of helping our community members, whether it's issues like mental health, to immigration, to housing. We often hear about that 6,600 number of cases that happened within the last 12 months. That was because of one group like Stop AAPI Hate that generously took down all that information. Otherwise we don't know if there would be enough data for articles and stories to have been written.

Congresswoman Grace Meng ([25:11](#)):

The other thing I think that is important is really follows what A.B. was talking about in terms of knowing our history. Students in this country do not get a complete enough teaching of what American history is.

Growing up, I was born and raised here, went to school here my whole life. But barely learned about certain parts of American history, like the Chinese Exclusion Act, like all these things that A.B. was mentioning. And so we're actually proposing legislation. I have legislation to diversify curriculum at the K through 12 level. And I'm also working with colleagues in the black and Hispanic caucus and Native American colleagues as well to ensure that our curriculum is more diverse in the future.

Chinh Pham ([26:05](#)):

No, absolutely. I think that bringing awareness through education is really critical in helping us as a nation to avoid similar mistakes in the future. So A.B. I know that as President of NAPABA, I'm sure you have a good pulse on the AAPI community. So what's your sense really going forward? In light of the new act was signed and some of the other legislation that was introduced by Congresswoman Meng. What can the AAPI community do, or how can we be empowered to act, to alleviate, or to address some of the violence and the hate that we're seeing?

A.B. Cruz III ([26:55](#)):

Chinh, there's no greater time than now to act. And I have to echo Congresswoman Meng's concern about attention spans here in the United States can shift pretty quickly. And in light of I always say that where there's challenge there's opportunity. And so I do think we have to seize upon this moment when our community is under siege. And there's the good thing about it is that there's a tension, there's concern, there are allies stepping up, but for how long. And so we at NAPABA are working diligently on everything. And Congresswoman Meng didn't mention this, but I applaud her HR, what is it? 1009, the COVID-19 language access that, Chinh, you mentioned. A lot of people don't realize that one third of our community has limited English proficiency.

A.B. Cruz III ([28:06](#)):

So this stuff matters. It was the reason NAPABA came up with the toolkit. We said we got to 25 languages and frankly I hope that's good. There could be more languages that we need. This legislation, I do hope that it finds its way in both houses. And Congresswoman Meng, you'll like the fact that this was a lobby day topic. It was one of our five topics that we brought up. So we're certainly trying to create momentum where it's needed and hopefully it will see the light of day. I think it's important. You talk about service and I can certainly go in that. I do think that what I'm seeing, I hope continues is people stepping up volunteering.

A.B. Cruz III ([28:57](#)):

I would like to replicate Congresswoman Meng's story a few times and have more people of AAPI descent in Congress, we could get a lot more done. You wanted me to weave in the story. I'm fortunate and I haven't told this story except in the last couple weeks, because I've never been asked. But how did I get to where I am? Well thank goodness for my parents. And they're still with me. They live three miles from me here. And I talked to them about it cause I wanted to make sure I had the facts right. They came to this country, I wasn't even born yet, with a six month old daughter, my older sister who, by the way, retired as a three star Admiral recently. Anyway, they traveled from the Philippines to Minneapolis on a visa so that my father could continue his training in the medical field.

A.B. Cruz III ([29:52](#)):

My brother and I were born. But soon thereafter, guess what? His training ended. We had to leave the country and we went back to the Philippines. But during his time in Minneapolis, my parents, they had

determined, they were going to get back to the United States, whatever it took. And as soon as they got back to the Philippines, or maybe even before, they were strategizing with relatives and so forth. How do we get my family back to the United States? Well, my dad ended up taking a job that I think I consider beneath him and beneath his qualifications in, of all places, Edmonton, Alberta. I guess Minneapolis, wasn't cold enough for him. So, but luckily he had cultivated some great relationships while he was training in Minneapolis. And lo and behold as luck would have it, about a year of waiting or so, he got that call or that letter that said, "Hey. There's a group of us heading down to San Antonio, Texas to start the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

A.B. Cruz III ([30:59](#)):

My dad jumped on that train, so to speak, as quickly. And next thing I know we are packing up our black 66 Impala, no air condition driving from Edmonton, Alberta all the way to San Antonio, Texas. And that's what opened the door, but it's such a that story could easily have not have happened. And my parents emphasized two things and not surprising. One being education. The other part was service to this country, even though they owe nothing to this country. They gave to our advice to the kids and that was whatever you do, make sure you give back to this country because they've given us the opportunity to do whatever we want to do. And fast forward when I retired from the Navy as a Rear Admiral, the first thing my dad did after I was retired, went through the nice ceremony at the Naval academy.

A.B. Cruz III ([31:59](#)):

He walked up to me and said, "Congratulations, son. Now, how are you going to serve?" So it's embedded in his DNA and he passed it on in our DNA. And I'm happy to say that four of us ended up serving in uniform as proud military members for this country. So that's hopefully weaving in a story that might not-

Chinh Pham ([32:26](#)):

Well, A.B. Well, thank you. Definitely thank you for your service. Perhaps with Congresswoman man's persuasiveness and your background in the military, we can corral and encourage more in the AAPI community to participate in public service going forward. And then I think that the AAPI community can have a very strong and significant voice going forward.

Speaker 1 ([32:56](#)):

Thank you for listening to part one of the discussion. Listen to the next episode for part two.