

AJC Hosts Asian American Leaders to Discuss Xenophobia Amid Coronavirus



March 19, 2020

In 2015, the World Health Organization issued guidelines on how to name new public health threats without stigmatizing entire communities, certain animal farmers, or other nations. But that guidance seems to have been forgotten as COVID-19 spreads across the U.S., alongside remarks and restrictions that target Chinese Americans and put the Asian American community at risk.

Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY) and Haipei Shue, President of United Chinese Americans, joined AJC on Tuesday for an online discussion about the rising racism and xenophobia that has targeted Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak. The conversation was the first in a series of digital programs AJC has developed as part of its [new Advocacy Anywhere initiative](#).

“We are literally seeing people get assaulted, get beat up, get bullied,” said Meng, speaking via videoconference from her home, where she is self-quarantined with her family. “We can talk about blame and point fingers another day when we have come to a more stable solution. But now is not the time to point fingers.”

Meng, whose district includes Queens, said that while New York has experienced the highest rates of coronavirus in the U.S., racism stemming from the disease has spread rampantly throughout the country, compounding a recent uptick of prejudice against Asian Americans. Shue said the last three years have been especially difficult.

“This is really like a one-two punch in our community,” Shue said. “In the last three years ... the Chinese American community has gone through a lot in terms of because of this worsening U.S.-China relations. Chinese scientists have been targeted and there is very tight scrutiny ... Many of us are shell shocked already.”

The Chinese American community also has faced accusations of dual loyalty, a charge all too familiar to those in the Jewish community. “It’s a really interesting time to think about how our communities can work together,” Shue said, mindful of the American Jewish community’s experience with hate in the U.S.

Meng added that recent events have underscored opportunities for collaboration around comprehensive hate crimes legislation. AJC has been urging Congress to adopt the [NO HATE Act](#) to improve FBI hate crimes reporting. In 2018, Birmingham, Newark, Syracuse, and more than 80 other cities with populations of more than 100,000 failed to report hate crimes to the FBI.

“We need more of our colleagues to understand how hate crimes and this sort of rhetoric, even outside of coronavirus, is impacting so many of our communities,” Meng said. “Local law enforcement constantly tells us, even at the federal level at the DOJ, that people are not reporting these crimes and incidents at the rate that they should be.”

Asian Americans Are Facing Violent Xenophobia During the Coronavirus Outbreak. Jews Have A Responsibility to Speak Out.

In addition to increased acts of physical violence, Chinese Americans are feeling even more isolated than their neighbors when they suffer microaggressions such as cold shoulders from passers-by, Shue said. At the same time, the situation has galvanized the Chinese American community to monitor and advocate for public policy in an unprecedented way.

“This is perhaps the greatest global crisis that we are witnessing, and therefore we need to act as it is,” Shue said. “Whatever difficulties, whatever divisions we have had in this country at this point, as long as on a people-to-people level we are together, we are going to survive. We are going to be OK.”

He bemoaned the partisan dimension of the crisis, saying those on the far right seem more interested than those on the left in blaming China and seeking revenge.

During the call, [The New York Times reported that China would expel American journalists](#) who work for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* in retaliation for the Trump administration’s restriction on Chinese citizens who work for five state-controlled news organizations. Correspondents from those media outlets were the first to report news of the virus.

Amid a pandemic and with other crises ahead, this is the wrong time to build a wall against information. China’s move will decrease global understanding and cooperation – when needed most. <https://t.co/z1HJOPLyCz>

— American Jewish Committee (@AJCGlobal) [March 17, 2020](#)

Shue said the Chinese community is thinking of anything but revenge.

“We are thinking about how we can give back to America, how to do fundraising and relief,” he said. The Seattle chapter of United Chinese Americans has raised more than \$100,000 for EvergreenHealth Medical Center, while another chapter has provided thousands of face masks and protective gear for Massachusetts General Hospital.

Meng said these domestic efforts are important to highlight. But international cooperation is key too. She and Shue said much can be learned from China, South Korea, and other nations' responses to the virus.

The U.S. needs to be “looking to see what a country like South Korea has done that is successful and make sure we are emulating that to have a more positive turn in the future than what we’re experiencing now.”

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