Asian Americans Advancing Justice Demands Apology from Secretary Zinke for Ignorant Remark Directed at Congresswoman Hanabusa

Zinke Remark Proves Cultural Insensitivity Remains Prevalent in Politics and the U.S.

Atlanta, Georgia, March 16, 2018 — Today, Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) called for U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, to issue a formal public apology to Representative Colleen Hanabusa for his inappropriate use of the Japanese language in response to her question about preserving funding for memorials recognizing the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Advancing Justice, an affiliation of five Asian American civil rights organizations, releases the following statement in calling for Zinke’s apology:

“Secretary Zinke’s remark was both inappropriate for the occasion and insensitive to Congresswoman Hanabusa, who had just imparted a deeply personal story of her grandfathers both being held in internment camps. Instead of showing sensitivity toward the subject and Representative Hanabusa, Secretary Zinke chose that inopportune time to share his lack of Japanese cultural knowledge when he responded flippantly, ‘Oh, Konnichiwa’ rather than offer a serious reply to the Congresswoman’s question. His remark also demonstrates the “perpetual foreigner” problem faced by Asian Pacific Americans. Although she is a fourth-generation American-born member of Congress, Secretary Zinke somehow thought it appropriate to greet the Congresswoman in Japanese.

The most appropriate remark Secretary Zinke could and should have made would have been to acknowledge Rep. Hanabusa’s tragic story and respect our shared history of the incarceration of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans as a shameful, dark moment in U.S. history that should be remembered as such by this administration. Secretary Zinke’s gaffe demonstrates how little we have learned from our history and why the administration must continue to fund these memorials.”

About Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta (formerly Asian American Legal Advocacy Center or AALAC) is the first non-profit law center dedicated to Asian immigrants and refugees (“Asian Americans”) in the Southeast.

Our goal is to engage, educate and empower under-represented Asian Americans to greater civic participation.

We are one of five independent organizations that make up the national Asian Americans Advancing Justice. Together with our affiliates in Chicago, DC, Los Angeles and San Francisco, we bring more than 100 years of collective experience in addressing the civil rights issues faced by Asian Americans and other vulnerable and underserved communities. Visit www.advancingjustice-atlanta.org.