

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Policy

February 27, 2020

There are over [22 million](#) Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in the United States, representing a wide range of values and cultures. American society is a mosaic made stronger and more productive by its diversity, and, as the [fastest growing population](#) in America, the AAPI community offers immense contributions to our shared culture, economy, and leadership.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are one of the most [linguistically and culturally diverse](#) populations in the country. Although as a whole the AAPI community has the highest levels of education and income, this population contains significant variation, with Indian Americans averaging around [\\$100,000](#) in annual household income and Burmese Americans closer to [\\$35,000](#). Given the diversity of the AAPI community — and the diversity of our country — Tom understands that the best policies are those that bolster all of us, together. A Steyer administration will strive for a more equitable America — and he will continue to engage with and learn from the AAPI community. Tom will appoint cabinet members that truly reflect our country's ethnicities, genders, and values to ensure all decisions made impacting the AAPI community include their input and life experiences.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, like all Americans, deserve good wages, affordable healthcare, a quality and free education, and a secure retirement. Tom's [economic agenda](#), [education plan](#), [justice-centered climate plan](#), and [affordable housing plan](#) will work in concert to truly expand the middle class by creating millions of good paying jobs, preparing our young people and working families for success in a new green economy, and restoring the health of our communities and our planet.

Unfortunately, the increased rhetoric of exclusion and bigotry from the current administration has the AAPI community — and many communities of color — worried about hate crimes and their long-term security and safety. Unfortunately, the current administration has weaponized our Census program as a way to target vulnerable communities — Tom understands that a good first step to addressing the needs of the

AAPI community is to support the Census Bureau in ensuring that data is disaggregated in its collection, analysis, and distribution. Only when we have a clear understanding of this community's complexity can we begin to address individual needs.

Climate

As a whole, Asian Americans are **30% more likely** to consider themselves environmentalists than the average American — and **over 75%** of Asian Americans said they'd support increasing regulations on power plants to address climate change. Tom has been committed to addressing environmental racism and tackling the climate crisis for over a decade. And members of the AAPI community are disproportionately affected by the impacts and causes of climate change and by environmental racism — together with Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are **the most likely group** to live in communities with hazardous air pollution that do not meet EPA standards.

AAPI communities **are exposed to more nickel, nitrate, and vanadium** than predominantly white communities. Environmental pollution comes at a significant cost: neighborhoods with high proportions of Chinese, Korean, and South Asian people **have significantly higher** cancer rates than neighborhoods with predominantly white populations. Tom has met and worked with AAPI leaders on the state and national level over the last decade and will continue to strengthen and expand those relationships to effectively address the pressing environmental health issues affecting these communities. Tom's **Justice-centered Climate Plan** will help AAPI communities by tackling climate change and environmental health issues, beginning with the communities most impacted.

Voting Rights

Before 1952, immigrants of Asian descent **were barred** from becoming American citizens. And since the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, the voting rights of Asian Americans **have been protected**. But the current administration and the Republican party are **actively working to erode** these protections. Increasing civic engagement and voter participation for all Americans will be a core component of a Steyer administration. If we are going to push power back to the people, we need full participation of all Americans. To protect the voting rights of all Americans, Tom will institute a National Vote at Home initiative to increase voter participation and believes a National Referendum would increase the voice of Americans in our democracy. Tom will also fight against Voter-ID laws and actively enforce and expand the language minority rights provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Jobs and the Economy

The Asian American and Pacific Islander community is not monolithic. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the **highest levels of economic disparity** in America, with the top 10% making over ten times more than the bottom 10%. And while the median household income of AAPI families is nearly **\$20,000 more a year** than the average American family, poverty rates for Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Nepalese, Native Hawaiian,

Pacific Islander, and other communities are [at least twice as high](#) as those of other national origins. This is yet another way in which the AAPI community reflects the American culture as a whole, with [economic inequality at an all time high](#). In the past 40 years, CEO compensation [has risen 940%](#) while the spending power of American wages [has remained stagnant](#). To address this, Tom's economic agenda will restore prosperity to all Americans by introducing a wealth tax, ending the corporate stranglehold on our government, and providing a broad 10% tax cut to 95% of Americans that will truly expand the middle class. Tom is committed to a fair shot at good wages, affordable healthcare and a secure retirement for all Americans.

Asian-American Small Businesses

From family-run businesses to manufacturing and technology firms, Asian American small businesses represent innovation, working families, and community. They are symbols of a thriving local economy, in which innovation is at the heart of everything they do. Yet, AAPI small business owners experience [significant challenges](#) in securing capital from mainstream U.S. financial institutions.

Tom established a small investment firm in 1986. Over the years, Tom achieved double-digit returns for his investors — his success built the firm to \$36B in investments. He and his wife Kat Taylor co-founded Beneficial State Bank, which, since 2007, has loaned money affordably to working people, small businesses and nonprofit community projects shut out by regular banks.

Tom will celebrate all that is made by Asian Americans when he is in the White House. Building on his work in community banking, Tom will expand funding for Community Development Financial Institutions to increase access to credit, reduce predatory lending, and foster entrepreneurship; and expand funding from the Community Reinvestment Act to reach more rural residents and foster local economic development. He will prioritize our local economies and American businesses by supporting the creation of Community Green Banks, establishing Green New Deal Investment Zones, and developing banking, investment, and insurance requirements that will shift funding from fossil fuels toward clean air, healthy families, and rapid commutes.

Many small businesses [struggle](#) to keep up with the rising costs with health care. Tom's public health care option will ensure that both small business employers and workers will have access to high quality, affordable health care. In addition, Tom would also grow the Small Business Health Options Plan (SHOP) and allow businesses with fewer than 50 employees to opt into the public option or choose to offer the private plan.

Trade across our national borders is a critical issue for many small businesses, who rely on customers outside of the US. Tom will help small businesses with advice on trade agreements, guidelines and assistance on market entry, and networking opportunities for expansion of Asian American companies with global partners.

Women, people of color, and veterans are among the [fastest](#) growing groups of entrepreneurs, yet face incredible headwinds when it comes to starting a new business. Tom will build community prosperity and ensure economic diversification for diverse businesses by expanding access to capital, market opportunities, and technical assistance. He will increase access to capital for women, Veterans, and business owners of color by enforcing discrimination laws. To help Asian American women access the assistance and guidance they need, he will increase SBA funding for Women's Business Centers. He will also reward companies that adhere to fair labor practices and employ a union workforce; advance community-led economic development strategies by supporting projects that include local hire, targeted hiring, and first-source hiring requirements; and build community benefit agreements into federal projects.

Home Ownership and Affordable Housing

Asian Americans as a whole have a [lower homeownership rate](#) than the U.S. public overall, with the exception of households that are of Vietnamese or Japanese descent. And while the percentage of immigrants from Asia has risen in the past decade, America's [Chinatowns are at risk](#) due to gentrification. And it isn't just Chinatowns — Asian Americans across the country are at a [high risk of displacement](#) due to unaffordable housing in their own neighborhoods. Tom understands that the best way to build family wealth and ensure the stability of a community is to ensure that they have safe, secure, and affordable housing. Tom's [affordable housing plan](#) will ensure that safe and affordable housing is available to every American — and a Steyer administration will partner with cities and communities to build climate-smart infrastructure all across the country. Tom will increase and improve America's supply of affordable housing, fight homelessness, develop climate-smart communities, and help American families build wealth through home-ownership.

Education

Asian Americans enjoy the highest levels of educational attainment of any group in the country. [High school](#) and [college graduation rates](#) for AAPI students are significantly higher than the national average. But these top-level figures obscure the educational disparities that exist within the AAPI community. [Nearly 75% of students of Chinese origin](#) enroll in college, compared to fewer than [30% of students of Burmese descent](#) and [48% of Hmong students](#). First generation Americans and English language learners also face additional challenges that the educational system is often not equipped to address.

To close the achievement gap within the AAPI community, [Tom's education plan](#) will provide free, universal access to high quality preschool, support English language learners, offer a tutor to every struggling student and chart a course for cutting the high school dropout rate in half by the end of his first term. Tom also will invest in excellent and diverse educators by raising educator pay, and expanding the teacher preparation programs, such as Grow-Your-Own models, that cultivate greater educator diversity and effectiveness. To ensure that every student has the skills and training to succeed in the 21st century economy, Tom will make sure college is affordable and accessible by offering two years of free community

college and expanding federal financial aid, such as Pell Grants. Tom will also invest in workforce development programs to expand local, good job opportunities in the energy, construction, transportation, agriculture, water, and information technology sectors, amongst others.

Health Care

Since the 1980s, health care costs for the average American family **have doubled**. And although the Affordable Care Act, gave **over one million** previously uninsured Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders coverage, AAPI communities **disproportionately do not take part** in health programs or health care, even with they are eligible. This results in **disparities in health and healthcare** for the AAPI community that range from increased incidence of certain cancers and heart disease to less satisfaction, fewer screenings and preventative services, and less access to health care. And a 2019 study found that clinical research for the AAPI community is significantly lacking, with **only 0.17%** of the National Institutes of Health budget going to research for this group. Tom understands that we need a strong public option for health care, but he also acknowledges that the Affordable Care Act is working for many Americans — especially for groups who previously lacked access such as the AAPI community.

Tom's **Right to Health plan** will enable the government to negotiate costs with medical groups and providers directly, just like Medicare does today. To eliminate surprise billing, he will cap emergency room expenses and will ensure that everything required for a patient's care — including medical professionals on call and lab work — are in-network. Prescription drug prices will be benchmarked against international standards and price-capped, so Americans can receive affordable medication. And a Steyer administration will enact antitrust regulations and consumer protection laws to break the corporate stranglehold over our health care system, while increasing affordability for the middle class by expanding financial subsidies offered by the ACA.

Immigration

Since 1965, **a quarter of all immigrants** have come from Asian countries, and nearly **2 out of 3** Asian-American adults were born abroad. We need an immigration system that is lawful, but also efficient. For immigrants from all backgrounds, we need clearer rules, ample counsel, support services, and shorter waits. Our immigration system should function as the standard-bearer of the values America holds.

A Steyer administration will defend and protect our family-based immigration system in any future immigration reform. Tom will work to cut the visa backlog for immigrant families waiting to reunite, some of which have been waiting decades for the opportunity to join their families — and he will end family separation and incarceration. Our best values — hard work, family, openness, unity, and freedom — are defined and exemplified by those who energetically contribute to our Great Experiment and choose to help build this wonderful country.

Tom will not hesitate to use executive authority to restore commonsense and humanity to our immigration system. He will end the abuses in our immigration system, including the 10.5 – 12 million undocumented Americans who are an important part of our society and integral to our country's economic engine. He will reinvigorate the asylum and refugee system, and he will reinstate DACA, enact DAPA, revitalize TPS, and end the racist Muslim travel ban.

Gun Violence

As president, Tom will declare gun violence a public health epidemic and dedicate time and resources to develop a cure. America's children are suffering from the threat of mass killings and fear of active shooters. Members of our communities suffer from gun violence in many forms: homicides, domestic violence, suicides, and police brutality. By and large, the American people agree on how we should solve this problem. They want Washington to act, have pleaded with their representatives and have begged them to do something—anything. But the NRA, armed with money and lots of lobbyists, has corrupted our democracy, and instead, Washington politicians write the rules that put corporate profits over people.

Tom is running for president to put power back in the hands of the people. We can do so much more on the front end to prevent gun violence, focus on safety and know the signs if someone is in distress, which is why Tom also supports a national licensing program. This will take leadership at the executive level, and action at the highest office to coordinate all aspects of this epidemic and support proven local interventions and bolster resources at the federal level.