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Contact: Holly Chang, Executive Director
media@committee100.org or 212-371-6565

Committee of 100 Urges Immigration Policy Consistent with American Values

(New York, NY, January 31, 2017) — As our nation considers how to define its identity through control of our borders, the Committee of 100 affirms the great ideals of this nation of immigrants. As an organization consisting of Chinese Americans, from those who arrived only recently to those whose families came more than a century ago, we celebrate the constant flow of immigration even as we understand the painful history that affected our ancestors. Chinese Americans in particular have had the experience of exclusion and expulsion, before achieving acceptance and equality. Our unique past offers particular insights for our shared future. We give pause when restrictive policies are not only proposed but implemented. These measures are judged to be ill-conceived in the fullness of time.

America's immigrant tradition is not a partisan issue. Many of every political persuasion are themselves proud to be descended from those who came for freedom and liberty. Every nation draws a line between those who are citizens and those who are not. The United States of America, however, does not draw lines based on race or religion. It has extended citizenship over time, regardless of skin color or faith. It has constantly improved itself by doing so. Chinese Americans know this story only too well. We owe it to ourselves to remember the progress we have made.

In 1882, Congress passed the [Chinese Exclusion Act](#). It did so following agitation in California and throughout the country that portrayed Chinese in racial and ethnic terms as “obnoxious” and undesirable. Chinese in America were attacked, including physically, for every vice. They also were attacked for their virtues, said to work so hard as to constitute “unfair competition.” In essence, they were a “yellow peril”, threatening the American way of life. They were turned away and barred from entry.

The Chinese Exclusion Act marked the first time the federal government enacted a ban on a specific community based on their identity. It was later expanded to cover an “Asiatic Barred Zone.” There were only a few exceptions. Even those already here, who had arrived legally, were forbidden from naturalization. They were deemed not to be “free white persons”.

Yet over time, thanks in part to the contributions of the few Chinese immigrants there were, and the alliance between China and the United States, these racial barriers were repealed. In 2011 and 2012, the United States [Senate](#) and [House of Representatives](#), respectively, passed formal statements of regret for their earlier actions.

They realized that Chinese Americans are patriots. They have succeeded and integrated themselves. In every field of achievement, from science and technology to arts and athletics to business and politics, Chinese Americans are to be found, loyal to this nation, adding to its diversity, and contributing to its distinction. Chinese Americans, like other Americans proud of their ethnic heritage, guarantee America's paramount position leading and innovating for the world.

Because of that history, we always remember the Chinese Exclusion Act as specific communities are deemed unwelcome. We understand the need to protect national security and to engage in the ongoing debate about immigration reform. As the nation considers how to define itself, the Committee of 100 urges our leaders to make good on our profound experiment in self-governance that continues to inspire peoples the world over. The best sign of our strength is that others wish to join us. Let us demonstrate that we are the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

The Committee of 100 is a non-partisan leadership organization of prominent Chinese Americans in business, government, academia, and the arts. For over 25 years, the Committee has been committed to a dual mission of promoting the full participation of Chinese Americans in all fields of American life, and encouraging constructive relations between the peoples of the United States and Greater China. www.committee100.org.

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