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Community Town Hall Meeting on China
Initiative

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Thank you to AAJC for bringing us community leaders together for a debriefing on the China Initiative - a policy that has had its supporters and critics. Unfortunately, the China Initiative has been used as a proxy for whether one's foreign policy position was tough or weak on the PRC, overlooking the domestic impact on its citizens.

To be clear, AAFEN was looking at only one of the China Initiative's goals: the law enforcement approach toward scientists, engineers and technical professionals at academic institutions under the premise of enhancing research security.

The issue is how Asian Americans are seen and treated.

The China Initiative was developed in an environment where Asian Americans were not seen as Americans. Even with foreseeable disparate impact on our community several years ago, researchers were not given fair notice of a pivot in U.S.-China foreign relations, much less changes in the disclosure policy on federal grants applications. Mass investigations began even before the national security and science enterprises agreed on what emerging technologies deserved protection. The Asian American researchers were disproportionately affected and received no due process.

Asian Americans were not even considered for an impact analysis before the China Initiative was enacted. From the enforcement actions, it appeared that Asian American researchers were often seen as the enemy within. Fortunately, there have been federal officials who have listened. But the damage has been done.

Asian Americans were not treated as Americans under the China Initiative. Raising echoes of Japanese American incarceration, McCarthyism, the surveillance on Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, Sikh, South Asian American (AMEMSA) communities, family ties, travel to Asia, business ventures, and cultural exchanges of Asian Americans are being treated as suspect. The federal government uses these factors as bases for investigations, deciding on federal funding, or maintaining federal employees' security clearances.

The problem with the China Initiative is that it's only the symptom. The deeper problem is that the US holds an out-dated, Western-centric view on national security. We render people who are "foreign" as the threats.

The US will be a majority minority in 2045. Are we prepared for a new global competition when we are marginalizing people who are different? Who speak different languages, have cultural competencies and foreign connections? To me, that sounds like assets. But to the government, they are threats.

To solve this problem, we should look to the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government - a powerful tool. Achieving full inclusion and belonging of all Americans is not only an aspiration; now, it too is national security.