Remarks by Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo at the National Asian / Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship 2023 Business Summit

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WASHINGTON – Today, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo delivered remarks at the National Asian / Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (National ACE) 2023 Business Summit celebrating Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. During his remarks, Deputy Secretary Adeyemo outlined how the Treasury Department has worked to expand economic opportunities for the AANHPI community and deliver economic assistance that reaches those who need it the most.

As Prepared for Delivery

Good afternoon and thank you for joining me. I want to especially thank National ACE for hosting and for your incredible partnership with Treasury over these past several years. As we've faced the unprecedented challenges of a global pandemic and its complex and disparate economic impacts, National ACE has been a crucial partner across issues, regions, and communities. You have not only helped us identify and understand the unique challenges the Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community faces, but also assisted us in building and delivering economic assistance programs that reach the members of your community who need it most.

President Biden and Vice President Harris's commitment to improving economic equity has run through the Administration's economic strategy and the actions we have taken since Day One.

I want to spend the majority of my time with you talking about everything we have done together to add more than 12 million jobs and create the opportunity for more than 10 million Americans to file applications to start new businesses over the last two years. But I need to start by making clear that the single greatest threat to the progress the American economy has made since the pandemic is Congress's failure to take action to meet the United States's obligations. Private sector forecasters have made clear that failure to lift the debt limit would lead to a recession, hurting small businesses around the country and leading to millions of jobs being lost. Congress must take

action to raise the debt limit and do what is needed to protect families and small businesses, as it has done nearly 80 times before. It is the only way to maintain the economic progress we've made.

That momentum started with the President's first signature legislative achievement, the American Rescue Plan.

As Treasury implemented benefits and programs totaling more than $1 trillion, we took steps to ensure members of your community and other communities of color would be able to access critical economic aid. For example, we made linguistically accessible outreach and support a key component of our implementation of the Emergency Rental Assistance program, which along with this Administration's other housing policies has helped prevent millions of evictions.

We also worked to ensure the people and institutions of this community were well-positioned to participate in and benefit from our programs through consistent, targeted outreach. National ACE has been an essential partner in that work. One year ago, I visited Los Angeles and sat across the table from a group of hard-working small business owners convened by National ACE, where I was able to share the actions we had taken and hear from them about how these programs could best serve their needs and what more was needed.

Partnerships like yours are vital to ensuring communities are able to take advantage of these efforts. So again, I want to say thank you.

And just a few months ago, President Biden reiterated this Administration's commitment to supporting your communities through the release of the first ever National Strategy to Advance Equity, Justice, and Opportunity for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Communities. This strategy builds on the efforts we have made across the Administration to truly invest in and unlock the potential of your communities.

Fortunately, our economy has recovered from the pandemic, with more than 12 million jobs added since President Biden took office after the two strongest years of job growth on record. The unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in over 50 years, at 3.4 percent. Among your communities, the unemployment rate is even lower. But our work is not over.

Going forward, we are focused on building lasting infrastructure to support small businesses and access to capital in your communities, so that people can pursue their ideas and build a better future for their families.

One example of these longer-term investments is the State Small Business Credit Initiative—or SSBCI—a $10 billion program reauthorized and expanded under the American Rescue Plan to invest in and build small business ecosystems in states and communities across the country.

SSBCI is yet another example of our commitment to not only take action to support your community and others but to ensure the resources we provide actually reach them. The program includes $500 million in technical assistance funding to help small businesses build the capacity they need to take on new capital, to grow, and to thrive.

In implementing this program, Treasury also created new systems designed to better track and report the demographics of the business owners that receive financing through SSBCI—including disaggregating AANHPI business ownership—so we can better understand whether we are meeting our aspiration to reach underserved business owners. We see these historic equity measurements as an important accountability tool.

Investment in small businesses has not been limited to Treasury or to our pandemic recovery programs. Across the Biden Administration, we have been focused on deploying capital to support small businesses through a variety of channels. The Small Business Administration (SBA), for example, has distributed more than $16 billion to Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) business owners and entrepreneurs through several programs, and is continuing its efforts to make capital available to communities that need it most.

The financing programs offered by Treasury and SBA will help ensure small businesses have the capital they need to tap into the green economy and access the opportunities created by the landmark legislation over the course of the last two years.

In addition to identifying opportunities to improve economic opportunity, we have also focused on how we can improve equity in the systems and institutions we oversee at the federal level. This is especially true when it comes to language.

It is critical that the benefits and services we provide be delivered in a way that is accessible to all communities, especially those that may face linguistic barriers.

We are in the midst of a historic transformation of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which not only collects the federal revenue that funds the programs I've mentioned but is also one of our most important distributors of federal funds—from R&D tax credits for small businesses that were doubled under the Inflation Reduction Act to the green credits that will help small businesses and others cut energy costs by transitioning to renewable energy sources or investing in energy efficiency.

As we have undertaken this work, one glaring shortcoming we encountered was that the IRS's systems were not language-accessible for many communities across the country. I want to thank many of you in this room for providing this feedback and for giving us guidance on how to rectify it.

As of today, we have landing pages on IRS.gov in 20 foreign languages including Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Urdu, Punjabi, and many others.

We have also scaled up the in-person support available at Taxpayer Assistance Centers across the country, including adding 17 new or re-opened assistance centers and hiring hundreds of new employees who can provide taxpayer services to individuals and small-businesses owners. Professional foreign language support is available in every one of these offices in many languages, through an over-the-phone translation service to help ensure this support reaches those in this community and others.

In addition, we are utilizing new funding for the IRS to improve the services we provide, especially for small businesses.

And we are already seeing the benefits: this 2023 filing season, the IRS answered two million more calls through live assistance than in 2022; cut phone wait times from 27 minutes to four minutes, and served 100,000 more taxpayers in-person than the year before.

And overall, a modernized and better-resourced IRS will be better-positioned to ensure small businesses can access the credits and refunds for which they are eligible in a timely manner.

I want to close by thanking all of you for working in close collaboration with me and my colleagues at Treasury and across the Administration in our efforts to improve economic equity. I'd especially like to thank Chiling Tong for her service on the Treasury Advisory Committee on Racial Equity (TACRE).

The Secretary and I are grateful for your insights and expertise to ensure Treasury's policy development and implementation are meeting the needs of the communities we're aiming to support. I ask that all of you please continue sharing with us the opportunities and challenges you see in your communities. And I encourage you to continue seeking out and applying for the federal resources that are available to you. Thank you again for welcoming me today, and for all of your support.