

OP-ED: Susan Ahn Cuddy in the Korea Texas Times, February 19, 2008

TRANSLATED FROM KOREAN

As the daughter of Dosan Ahn Chang Ho, I grew up in a Korean-American household where there was much discussion of government, politics and democracy. Later, I was the first female Asian-American officer in the United States Navy. I also worked for the government for many years as a codebreaker for the National Security Agency. However, I have never been moved to speak out in a U.S. presidential campaign – until now.

Today, we are at war, our economy is struggling, millions of people don't have health care, our environment is getting worse, and our political leaders are divided. We need a leader who can unite all Americans, including Democrats, Republicans, and independents, to address the problems facing us.

This is why I support Senator Barack Obama. He is the only candidate who is capable of inspiring different groups of people to work together to solve our nation's problems. When I see Senator Barack Obama excite the American public with his message of unity and change, I am reminded of my father Dosan. My father was a national leader of integrity and purpose who inspired and led the Korean people to fight for independence from Japanese imperialism in the early 1900s. Today, I see Senator Obama providing similar inspiration and leadership to the American people.

Some people say that Obama does not have enough experience to be president. I disagree. My father was only 29 years old when he argued the case for Korean independence in 1907. At the age of 35, my father, as president of the Korean National Association (KNA), successfully petitioned the U.S. government to have KNA, instead of the Japanese emperor, recognized as the official representative of Koreans.

Similarly, Barack Obama, at the age of 43, was the only one among the major presidential candidates who had the judgment and wisdom to oppose the war in Iraq from the very beginning. When Obama is sworn into office, he will be older than both John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton when they took office. In any event, as an active 93-year-old, I don't think people should be judged based on their chronological age.

I am impressed by Senator Obama's experience, which is rooted in the real lives of real people, including his work as a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago, civil rights attorney, a state Senator, and a U.S. Senator. In fact, Obama has more legislative experience than Senator Clinton. Because of my belief in the importance of higher education, I am also impressed by the fact that Senator Obama was the editor-in-chief of the Harvard Law Review and a professor of constitutional law at the University of Chicago.

For Koreans and other Asian Americans, Senator Obama comes down on the right side of all the major issues. He believes in reforming our immigration system to strengthen family unification, speed up the legal immigration process, and reduce immigration fees. Senator Obama also wants to make greater investments in minority-owned small businesses. Obama has the support of respected Korean leaders such as attorney and civil rights activist Angela Oh, Boston City Councilor Sam Yoon, San Francisco Board of Education Commissioner Jane Kim, and Mayor Jun Choi of Edison, New Jersey.

Just as important, Senator Obama has a unique understanding of the perspective of Asian-Americans. He lived in Indonesia during his youth with an Indonesian stepfather; he went to high school in the highly multicultural state of Hawaii; his half-sister is Asian-American, her husband is Chinese-Canadian, and when Obama becomes President, it will mark the first time that Asian Americans become a part of the First Family. I think we all understand the benefit of having multi-cultural perspectives when dealing with a country as diverse as America.

Senator Obama is the best candidate for the Korean community for precisely the same reasons that he is right for our nation – he has the courage, leadership, and toughness to confront the greatest challenges facing us today, but also the wisdom, experience, and judgment to realize that the American dream is only possible if the country is united.

I had been a Republican all my life, but for the first time I am supporting a Democratic candidate, Senator Obama. Texas has an open primary, so you can vote for Senator Obama whether you are a Republican, Democrat or independent. Please join me in supporting Senator Barack Obama for President.