



A vow to fight racial profiling

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Two of the most feisty women activists on Capitol Hill, Senator Barbara Mikulski and Representative Judy Chu, both Democrats representing Maryland and California, respectively, pledged at the 21st annual Congressional reception hosted by the National Federation of Indian American Associations that they would be unrelenting in fighting racial profiling of India Americans, especially Sikh Americans and Muslim Americans, which has grown exponentially since 9/11.

Mikulski, the longest-serving female Senator who is considered one of the toughest fighters in the traditionally male preserve and has been a mentor to junior female Senators like Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, promised to make sure that the Indian-American community would be entitled to all the benefits of a quality education, no matter whether they were affluent or low-income.

'The Indian-American community plays an active and important role in Maryland and in the country and impresses all of us with their work ethic and family values,' she said. 'It has been my privilege to fight for issues that are critical to the Indian-American community, because I believe that every person in this country should have access to a quality and affordable education. Every student should have the freedom to achieve, and that freedom should not be limited by race, ethnicity, or the size of your family's wallet. That is why I am an original sponsor of the DREAM Act, which would permit students who joined the military, or are in an institution of higher education to adjust their status and be on a path towards citizenship.'

She added, 'I will continue to work on finding sensible, bipartisan solutions to fix that immigration system.'

Mikulski acknowledged that she shared the community's 'concerns about racial profiling.'



US Representative Judy Chu, left, and NFLA President Lal Motwani

PHOTOGRAPHS: PARESH GANDHI

She said, 'Such practices are an abuse of authority and a serious violation of civil rights. That is why I am a proud original co-sponsor of the End Racial Profiling Act of 2010. This will extend the federal ban on racial profiling to state and local law enforcement and permits people to take legal action if they have been the victims of racial profiling.'

Exhorting the community to urge their respective lawmakers to co-sponsor and push for the enactment of this legislation, she said, 'Additionally, it equips law enforcement with tools to eliminate racial profiling in the long-term.'

Chu, the first Chinese American elected to Congress, and now in her second term, said, 'One of the first things I did was to join the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans. It's really a pleasure to be in that Caucus because it is one of the largest Caucuses in Congress with over 180 members and it's actually amazing and it's bipartisan. So, we definitely have India's interests in mind.'

She said the organization she heads, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, had 'a large number of Asian Americans and Indian Americans in their districts, and it's a national organization. So, we really do have the ability to make a difference on issues that are of concern to you.'

Chu said some of the priority issues being worked on at CAPAC included, 'making sure that we stop this racial profiling against Muslim Americans and South Asian Americans. We must stop it, and especially at the airports, where we think that the TSA have had screening processes that have unfairly discriminated against Indian Americans, South Asian Americans and Sikh Americans. We have met on a continuous basis with them to change that.'

Chu, who also serves on the House Judiciary and Small Business Committees, said, 'The other thing is that we have to fix our economy and as a member of the Small Business Committee, I am working to make sure that we change policy, so that it is easier for everybody to achieve the American dream. Immigrants are part and parcel of America's success and we have to break down the barriers in small business that prevent people from succeeding as much as they can.'

She added, 'We have to raise the dream of immigrants, the small business owners and the innovators, and I know that there are many amongst your group who are those that have achieved the American dream. We want to follow that example and break down the barriers for others that are coming behind you. So, let's make sure that we continue the dialogue, that we are partners.'

'We should be working harder to put India on the map'

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law and all the other things that we all share, that we all value. I am going to be pushing very hard as we all will in the India Caucus for this dialogue to be strengthened and for the two countries to continue to work more and more closely together.'

On the Pakistan front, Pallone said, 'There is a lot of concern on the part of members of Congress, including myself, about whether aid that's given to Pakistan for military purposes — we don't have a problem with development and humanitarian aid — is used in the wrong way for the wrong reasons. You are going to see various restrictions on aid to Pakistan.'

The senior lawmaker also tackled the subject of immigration. 'Many people complain to me in my community about increasing problems with visas and with immigration in general,' he said. 'We deal with those things on an individual basis when the cases come up, but we are also trying to see if we can do something on a more national level where visas have been denied for people that want to come over for marriages, for business, or whatever other purposes.'

Acknowledging that this is 'something

that needs attention,' he said, 'Some of you may know that back in the fall — in the House — we passed a bill that would open up visas for skilled workers, mostly for sciences, computer professionals, and we are hoping that we can get something like that passed, because it would definitely benefit



US Congressman Ed Royce

India and those who would come over from India.'

Pallone said he was a 'big advocate' of Indian companies invest here and US companies invest in India. He said he had spoken to Indian ministers about the need for the government there to open up foreign investment and added, 'We are also seeing more Indian companies expand their operations here, and some of you are probably tired of my taking about it, because I talk about Ranbaxy a lot because it's in my district. But Ranbaxy — the generic drug company — is now expanding in my district and going to have another 400, 500 jobs in the New Brunswick area. So, there is a lot of opportunities for increased trade and investment here by Indian companies and investment in India by American companies. And, within the Caucus, we are going to do our best to try and encourage that as much as possible.'

US Congressman Ed Royce, California Republican and the GOP co-chair of the Indian Caucus, spoke of the growth in the US-India relationship — from 12 members in the Caucus in 1993 to 160 now and \$25 billion in trade between the two countries in 2000 to \$100 billion in trade now.

But, he argued, 'That's not good enough... We should be working harder to put India on the map for trade and investment. We should be working harder for reforms in India, and reforms here, which will lead to more opportunities for trade and investment because our partnerships overseas should be based on common values and the values that we share with India are our closest values — political pluralism, tolerance. We both got changes to make in our systems to get there, but we are on the right road.'

Taking a swipe at China, he added, 'It is not based on an authoritarian concept. It is based upon a democratic ideal — India is, and the United States is.'

The lawmaker, who is a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also said that in the wake of the recent US-India Strategic Dialogue, 'It is vital that we understand that the United States should be thinking long-range in terms of how to strengthen this alliance with India, and how to create an environment in which there is greater economic growth in India, and how to cooperate on counter-terrorism, with our natural ally — India.'

He pledged to work with NFLA 'to further cement that relationship.'