

Hello and thank you! It is so good to be here. Thank you to KABA President Chris Chang and to the KABA Board for inviting me to join you this evening. It is an honor give tonight's keynote.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to thank and celebrate with so many in our Korean American community – together, we made history.

It is the great honor of my life to be the first woman and the first person of color elected to serve as King County Prosecuting Attorney.

And, I am honored to be the first Korean American woman in the United States to be elected Prosecuting Attorney.

As a career prosecutor, I have dedicated my entire career to public safety and public service, and it is humbling that my life's work has led me to this historic moment.

I am so honored to celebrate these historic firsts with this audience.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all who traveled this road with me – a journey that started as an infant born in Seoul, South Korea to serving as King County Prosecuting Attorney.

And while I am grateful for each and every person in the room who played a role in helping me get here,

I want to take a moment to specifically acknowledge and celebrate some key women leaders in our Korean American community whom I am especially indebted to:

Martha Choe
Cheryl Lee
Consul General Seo
Judge Marianne Spearman
Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland
Hyeok Kim
Representative Cindy Ryu
Julie Kang
Shelly Koh
Young Brown
Shari Song

And while these two women are not Korean American, I absolutely owe a debt of gratitude to Grace Yuan and Sharon Sakamoto.

These women are trailblazers who broke glass ceilings, dismantled barriers, and opened doors – and who continue to hold the doors open for all who follow in their footsteps. No words can fully express what their support means to me.

And to these women and the other leaders and trailblazers who supported me – and there are many in this room -- I stand on your shoulders. Your strengths and talents inspire me. I am deeply moved by the hope and faith you have placed in me. Thank you. I am so proud to join you, to walk with you, and to do my part in continuing to increase opportunities and representation.

Representation matters. Together, we can and will ensure that while I may be the first woman and first Korean American to serve in this role, I will not be the last.

And I need to say a few words of special, heartfelt thanks to our Asian American and Korean American communities who provided me so much support and encouragement – not just here in King County, but from all over the United States.

For those of you who don't know, I was separated from my Korean mother at a young age, and as a result, I did not grow up knowing or understanding my Korean ancestry or culture.

I did not grow up hearing or speaking Korean. I did not grow up eating Korean food or celebrating Korean history or holidays. I did not have Korean aunts – ajumma – looking after me.

When I announced my run for office, I expected to encounter surprises along the way. I'm so happy that one of those surprises turned out to be an unexpected gift: our Asian American communities, and especially our Korean American community, welcomed me like a long, lost daughter, came out in force to support me, and repeatedly told me how proud they are of me.

I have shared this part of my story many times now, and every time, I still get emotional. Because it wasn't until my experience during the campaign – when I saw and felt Asian American communities wrapping their support around me – that I realized that being seen as, accepted as, and celebrated as an Asian American and a Korean American was a piece of myself that I had been missing.

I am, of course, grateful for the support and encouragement I received, but I am especially grateful for the recognition of my Asian heritage and for the gift of identity and belonging that my Korean American community provided me.

And I am happy to report that I now have a small army of strong and mighty ajumma to lean on and learn from. Woe to those who underestimate their protectiveness. I feel so loved and cared for. And I am grateful to have them cheering me on.

This feeling is why representation matters.

We all want to be seen. We all want to be understood. We all want to be recognized as worthy. We all want equal opportunities. We all want our lived experiences to be valued. And we all want to be safe as our authentic selves.

The deep-rooted call for belonging is universal, and I know in my heart that every time we answer this call, we march closer to equity and justice.

This past Saturday, I attended an amazing event to celebrate Assunta Ng and George Liu. Assunta founded the Seattle Chinese Post and the NW Asian Weekly, and her husband George gave up an engineering career to serve as the papers' business manager.

During the event, I heard an astonishing statistic – that those who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander comprise 40% of the world's population.

I was struck by how large our numbers are. In King County, 20% of our population identifies as Asian or Pacific Islander. It stands to reason that 20% of our board rooms, C-suites, law firm partnerships, and all office leadership – including my own, should be 20% Asian or Pacific Islander.

Yet, we all know that this is not the case. We know that building diversity and growing representation doesn't just happen on its own and that our leadership ranks do not magically reflect the racial makeup of our communities. Not only does it take intentional focus and work to build more diverse and inclusive leadership, it also takes the active acknowledgment and dismantling of racial bias, stereotypes, and discrimination.

It takes leaders who are willing to think and act differently.

As I look out across this room, I suspect everyone here has been told at one point or another that one way to increase representation is through mentorship and sponsorship.

Mentorships and sponsorships can be powerful tools for building a stronger, more diverse leadership team or Executive Suite. Mentorship and sponsorship are often talked about as if they are the same thing. We should all recognize the important distinctions.

A mentorship is a relationship between someone sharing knowledge and providing guidance (the mentor) and someone learning from that person's experience (the mentee).

It is often the mentee who manages this relationship, reaching out to the mentor when they need guidance and advice. Often a single person may serve as mentor to several mentees.

Sponsorships can often spring from a strong and successful mentorship, but not always. Sponsorships are often described as a person – typically someone who holds power and influence – who spends their social capital or uses their influence to advocate for a protégé.

Sponsors work to expand their protégé's visibility within an organization. Sponsors intentionally involve their protegee in experiences that provide opportunities for career advancement.

In essence, sponsors put their reputation and professional brand behind the protégé. Sponsors often come to feel personally invested in the advancement of the protégé.

I have heard this quick summary of these distinctions: A mentor is someone you talk to. A sponsor is someone who talks about you – in all the right ways -- when you're not in the room.

While these definitions seem intuitive at first glance, it is important for us to understand the distinctions. If asked to unpack what it means to be a sponsor in terms of concrete behaviors, many of us struggle to do so. In fact, many of us believe that we are sponsoring someone, when we are, in actuality, providing mentorship.

Mentoring is important, but mentorship alone does not increase diversity within leadership ranks. In fact, studies have shown that women and people of color are often over-mentored and under-sponsored. This is among the reasons why we see too few women and people of color holding leadership positions.

While mentorships serve an important purpose – sponsorships are what create opportunities. We must understand and talk about the distinctions between mentorship and sponsorship. Otherwise, we may believe we are supporting people to their fullest potential, but in reality, we are offering only one form of important support.

Sponsorships should be a relatively simple strategy to create opportunities that uplift women, people of color, and other historically marginalized individuals. However – and this will surprise no one in this room – it is far more difficult for us to serve as sponsors than those who have been doing so for generations.

It is more difficult for us because sponsors work to manage the views and opinions of others. In a sponsorship, the work is not so much between the sponsor and their protégé, but between the sponsor and an *audience*. The Sponsor works to shape what influencers and decision-makers think about their protégé's skills, talents, and worthiness.

Here are some common behaviors of sponsors, and I encourage all of us to think about these behaviors – and how we can incorporate them in our own practices.

Sponsors amplify. Sponsors do this by promoting their protégé's accomplishments to others. This serves to enhance an audience's positive impressions of the protégé and their talents. It is easy to understand this concept when you think of how powerful it is when someone else does the bragging.

Sponsors connect, and they do this in two important ways. First, sponsors connect their proteges to important people and opportunities. Sponsors invite their proteges to influential events and to join important conversations.

Sponsor also lend their power and influence to their protégé. Proteges benefit simply by being connected to and seen with their Sponsor. This is sometimes referred to as a "halo effect." This concept is easy to understand when you think of the buzz that follows from being seen and included in certain circles.

Sponsors boost. Sponsors leverage their power and influence to validate their protégé's skills and capabilities. This, in effect, becomes the Sponsor's personal guarantee of the protégé's future success. If you have ever benefitted from a recommendation, you have experienced boosting.

Boosting is especially important when uplifting women and other historically marginalized individuals. Because of bias and stereotypes, these individuals can unfairly receive lower performance assessments. In fact, the majority culture standards used to evaluate performance often under-value or completely overlook the important contributions made by women and other historically marginalized individuals.

It is especially hard for women and historically marginalized individuals to advance when they are outnumbered in white and male-dominated fields. They are especially in need of sponsors who can boost and validate the legitimacy of their skills.

And finally, Sponsors defend. Sponsors work to persuade and change the opinions of an audience that dismisses or dislikes their protégé.

Boosting and defending are two extremely important sponsorship actions. When Sponsors go to bat for women and other historically marginalized individuals, it can be costly and emotionally disheartening work because it requires challenging the attitudes and beliefs of others. Boosting and defending a proteges' skills and talents can even create conflict between the Sponsor and the audience.

Most of us have benefitted from sponsorship in some form. And the power of sponsorship leads many of us to take stock of those in our lives who serve to amplify, connect, boost, and defend us. Yet – if we are truly committed to equity, we must consider not just how we, as individuals benefit from sponsorships, but how we can serve as sponsors.

Do we see high-performing individuals who are flying under the radar screen? If so, can we amplify their achievements? Can we enhance their exposure by connecting them to powerful individuals or inviting them to important meetings? If others are inappropriately discounting someone's talent, can we stand behind them and defend them?

While we must still work to address the deep-seeded challenges associated with systemic racism and systematic oppression, sponsorships can work to increase the diversity of our leadership ranks.

Sponsorships are personal endeavors and actions. More of us in the room can and should be sponsors

I am inviting those of you who have power and influence to join me in amplifying, connecting, boosting, and defending those who have been overlooked and denied opportunity and promotion.

Our actions are needed to build a world where our offices reflect the faces I see tonight. Our actions are needed to build a world where Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are represented as leaders in ways that are commensurate with our representation out in the world.

Together, we can create leaders who are more reflective of our populations and numbers. Together, let's be part of a new wave of Asian American and Pacific Islander representation that gets us closer to the equity we all seek.

Increasing diversity and representation in our leadership ranks is a Team effort. Let's work together to bring this type of positive – and necessary – change to our organizations.

Let's work together so that we no longer have to celebrate women, people of color or other marginalized individuals as historic firsts, but can instead, celebrate a world where recognition and influence among women, people of color, and the historically marginalized is our natural and everyday experience.

Thank you!