

2026/04/06 APA Justice Monthly Meeting

APA Justice Meeting – Monday, 2026/04/06

1:55 pm Eastern Time / 10:55 am Pacific Time

1. Update from CAPAC

Speaker: Judith Teruya, Executive Director, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), Judith.Teruya@mail.house.gov

Not on record.

2. Update from Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC

Speaker: Joanna YangQing Derman, Director, Anti-Profilng, Civil Rights & National Security Program, Advancing Justice | AAJC, jderman@advancingjustice-aaajc.org

- Advancing Justice | AAJC: [Anti-Profilng, Civil Rights & National Security Program](#)

Joanna provided an update focused on three key policy areas: efforts to revive the China Initiative, the pending expiration of FISA Section 702, and new Small Business Administration (SBA) eligibility rules.

First, she highlighted recent legislative activity in the House, where a bill (H.R. 1468) advancing through the Judiciary Committee seeks to effectively reinstate the previously discontinued China Initiative under a different name. Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, working with coalition partners, is actively opposing the measure and preparing a follow-up letter to Congress reiterating longstanding concerns about its discriminatory impact. The letter will be sent to groups that signed on before, giving them the opportunity to opt out if they so choose.

Second, on Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, Joanna noted the approaching expiration deadline of April 20 and emphasized that while the authority is viewed as important for national security, it also raises significant civil liberties concerns. She underscored the need for robust privacy protections and oversight, particularly given the use of warrantless searches for Americans' communications. AAJC is engaging with lawmakers to support reform efforts as Congress debates reauthorization.

Finally, Joanna discussed recent SBA policy changes requiring 100% U.S. citizen ownership for key loan programs, reversing prior rules. She warned that these new rules could disproportionately affect Asian American–owned businesses, especially those with complex immigration statuses or ties to China or Hong Kong, by limiting access to capital and echoing past discriminatory practices. Advocacy efforts are underway to address these concerns with policymakers.

3. Update from Asian American Scholar Forum

Speaker: Gisela Perez Kusakawa, Executive Director, [Asian American Scholar Forum](#) (AASF), gpkusakawa@asforum.org

Gisela highlighted the Asian American Scholar Forum’s continued focus on advocacy, education, and community protection in response to national security–related policies affecting Asian American scholars.

Gisela began by expressing appreciation in working with Advancing Justice | AAJC, Stop AAPI Hate, and Chinese for Affirmative Action, emphasizing AASF’s role in opposing efforts to revive the China Initiative. AASF’s approach centers on elevating the stories of individuals directly impacted, including the tragedy of Dr. Jane Wu. She underscored the broader “McCarthy-like” climate such policies can create—not only within the justice system, but also across workplaces and families.

Gisela also pointed to ongoing engagement with policymakers to promote a more balanced, data-driven approach to research security, including a letter from Reps Grace Meng and Ro Khanna to the interim National Science Foundation director, encouraging continued funding for American scientific efforts.

Gisela highlighted support for the SECURE program under the CHIPS and Science Act, which aims to strengthen the U.S. research ecosystem through analytics and five regional centers. She stressed that evidence-based, systemic approaches are critical to managing risk without resorting to discriminatory practices that could harm Asian American scientists.

Finally, she announced AASF’s upcoming AIX Summit East in New York on April 17, 2026, which will convene leading AI researchers and emerging talent to explore the transformative impact of artificial intelligence across science, engineering, health, education, and finance. It will bring together past visionaries as well as rising stars and students who will build the future of AI.

Overall, her remarks emphasized both defending civil rights and fostering an inclusive, competitive U.S. research environment.

4. Remarks by Eric Zheng

Speaker: [Eric Zheng](#), President, The American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai

Eric Zheng is President of AmCham Shanghai, the largest American chamber of commerce in Asia Pacific. Prior to his current role with AmCham Shanghai, Eric had a successful career with AIG including serving as President & CEO of AIG China. Eric has been active in several non-profit and charity organizations. He is a member of Committee of 100 and currently serves as Chair of Committee of 100 Greater China Region.

Eric offered an on-the-ground perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing American companies in China, set against a backdrop of evolving U.S.-China relations.

He began by noting that 2026 is a consequential year for bilateral ties, with anticipated high-level visits between the United States and China. Within this context, he highlighted the role of AmCham Shanghai as a longstanding institution supporting commercial engagement and mutual understanding between the two countries.

Eric briefly traced the organization's history, noting that AmCham Shanghai was originally founded in 1915, reflecting an early American business presence in China. It ceased operations in 1950 following the founding of the People's Republic of China, and was reestablished in 1987 after China reopened to the global economy. Today, it represents approximately 1,000 multinational companies, primarily U.S.-headquartered firms, making it one of the largest American chambers of commerce in the Asia-Pacific region.

Turning to the economic relationship, Eric emphasized the scale and depth of U.S.-China commercial ties. He cited roughly \$421 billion in Chinese exports to the U.S. and \$151 billion in U.S. exports to China, along with significant two-way investment flows. However, he underscored that this interdependence is increasingly challenged by policy volatility, particularly fluctuating tariff regimes. At one point, tariffs reached as high as 145% on Chinese goods, and although they have since declined, they remain elevated. As Eric observed, "when you run a company, you need some predictability... it's really hard to plan for the long term" amid shifting policies.

He identified three primary challenges facing American companies in China:

- **Geopolitical tensions**, which he described as the "number one challenge," creating uncertainty in both policy and business environments;
- **Rising domestic competition**, with Chinese firms now highly innovative and competitive—"no longer copycats"—and in many areas outperforming multinational companies;
- **Economic slowdown**, as China's growth moderates and business expectations soften.

Eric noted that American firms now see themselves leading mainly in product quality and development, while falling behind in areas such as speed to market, licensing, digital capabilities, and adoption of emerging technologies. Reflecting these pressures, business confidence has declined sharply, with only about 41% of companies expressing optimism about their five-year outlook in China—down significantly from historical levels near 80%.

Despite these headwinds, Eric emphasized that China remains a critical market. He pointed to continued GDP growth of around 5%, a \$19.6 trillion economy, and a rapidly expanding middle class projected to grow from 400 million to 800 million by 2035. He illustrated this scale by noting that China’s annual economic growth is “almost a trillion U.S. dollars,” effectively “recreating a Switzerland every year.”

He explained that American companies remain engaged for two main reasons: to serve China’s large domestic market (“in China for China”) and to support global supply chains (“in China for global”).

Eric concluded on a firm and pragmatic note, emphasizing that continued U.S. business engagement in China is not optional but strategically necessary. Despite geopolitical tensions and market challenges, he argued that disengagement would come at a significant cost to U.S. competitiveness, innovation, and global influence. Operating in China, he noted, is essential not only for accessing a critical market but also for learning from increasingly sophisticated competitors and staying at the forefront of global industry trends.

In his view, the stakes extend beyond individual companies to broader national interests. A sustained U.S. commercial presence in China helps preserve economic linkages, supports mutual understanding, and ensures that American firms remain relevant in one of the world’s most important markets. As he underscored, maintaining this presence is ultimately “in the best interest of the United States”—not just as a matter of business, but as a matter of long-term strategic positioning in a competitive global landscape.

5. Remarks by Susan A. Thornton

Speaker: [Susan A. Thornton](#), Vice Chair, U.S. Heartland China Association

Susan A. Thornton is Vice Chair, U.S. Heartland China Association. She is a retired senior U.S. diplomat with almost three decades of experience with the U.S. State Department in Eurasia and East Asia. She is currently a Senior Fellow and Visiting Lecturer in Law at the Yale Law School Paul Tsai China Center. She is also the director of the Forum on Asia-Pacific Security at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Susan highlighted her work with the U.S. Heartland China Association (USHCA), which seeks to expand U.S.-China engagement beyond the coasts by focusing on the American heartland. The

organization, chaired by former Missouri Governor Bob Holden, promotes connectivity in trade, education, and cultural exchange across “the 20-something states in the middle of the country” that often have less exposure to China-related opportunities and policy discussions.

She described a range of initiatives, including agricultural cooperation, health system exchanges, and local government engagement. In agriculture, the group connects U.S. growers, researchers, and industry associations with Chinese counterparts to explore “the future of food systems,” and organizes events such as the annual U.S.-China Agricultural Roundtable in Henan Province. Educational exchanges are another priority, with programs that send American students—particularly from historically Black colleges and universities—to China, providing opportunities that “they would probably otherwise not have.” USHCA also promotes Chinese language learning and cultural education, reflecting concerns about a declining pipeline of U.S. China expertise.

Susan emphasized the strategic importance of broadening national understanding of China, stating that “Americans will need to know more about China in the future, not less,” and that such knowledge “should not be overly concentrated on the two coasts.” She also highlighted local-level exchanges, including forums that bring together U.S. and Chinese municipal leaders to share experiences on issues like climate change, economic development, and public health.

At the same time, she noted that this work has become increasingly difficult. Visa restrictions, travel uncertainties, and rising geopolitical tensions are complicating exchanges on both sides. She observed that “exchanges between the U.S. and China are becoming more fraught,” with students and scholars facing growing obstacles. Susan also pointed to a lack of clarity in U.S. policy, noting that agencies often operate without clear guidance, leading to actions that can appear “arbitrary” or “politicized.” She warned that China-related issues are increasingly “ripe for fear-mongering and weaponization” in the current political climate, including through state-level legislation.

Despite these challenges, Susan stressed that the risks should not outweigh the benefits of engagement. She underscored that her organization takes a careful, independent approach, including not accepting funding from China, and remains committed to its mission.

Concluding on a forward-looking note, she emphasized that engagement with China is not optional for the United States—particularly for the heartland—and expressed hope that upcoming high-level meetings could help reinforce the importance of sustained exchanges and mutual understanding.

6. Remarks by Susan Shirk

Speaker: [Susan Shirk](#), Research Professor; Director Emerita, 21st Century China Center, University of California, San Diego

Susan Shirk is Research Professor at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy and Director Emerita of its 21st Century China Center. As former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs and lifetime experiences, she is one of the most influential experts working on U.S.-China relations and Chinese politics. She is also Director Emerita of the UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC).

Susan offered a candid and notably pessimistic assessment of upcoming U.S.–China leader engagement between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. While she acknowledged that leader-level diplomacy can create openings—what Joseph Nye has called the “funnel of choice”—she stressed that success depends on intensive groundwork that is currently lacking.

Drawing on her experience in the State Department, she noted that past progress came only after extensive staff-level negotiations: *“Professionals... put in hours of diplomatic efforts... before the leaders meet,”* allowing both sides to define priorities, understand each other, and prepare deliverables. These preparations, she emphasized, are essential to making summits productive rather than symbolic.

Susan had initially hoped the spring meeting could launch a sustained diplomatic process, but now sees more limited prospects.

At best, she expects continuity rather than breakthroughs—likely preserving the existing “Busan truce” on tariffs, export controls, and rare earths. There may be incremental progress on trade and investment, such as movement on Phase 1 commitments or narrowly scoped Chinese investment in the U.S. However, she sees little chance of progress on harder issues.

Susan warned that failure to address national security and people-to-people exchanges—including academic, journalist, and student flows—would be “tragic” and potentially dangerous. Taiwan is a particular concern, noting the absence of a clear U.S. strategy, raising the risk of improvised decisions during leader talks that could undermine regional stability

Her strongest criticism focused on the lack of preparation, which she described bluntly as “really diplomatic malpractice.”

She pointed to weakened U.S. interagency capacity, limited sub-cabinet engagement, and a hollowed-out policy process: “Almost nothing at the sub-cabinet level... the National Security Council Asia staff is thinned out to almost no one.”

At the same time, decision-making has become highly centralized. “The U.S. system has become almost as centralized... as China’s,” Susan said, leaving officials uncertain about objectives and reluctant to act proactively.

In summary, Susan believes the absence of serious diplomatic preparation severely limits the potential of upcoming leader meetings. At best, they may stabilize tensions; at worst, they risk unstructured, leader-driven outcomes that could increase strategic instability.

7. Q&A and Discussions

8. Next Meeting

The next monthly meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 4, 2026, starting 1:55 pm ET/10:55 am PT