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Pete Hoekstra  
Hoekstra for Senate  
190 Monroe Avenue NW, Suite 300  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

February 6, 2012

**Re: Anti-Chinese Television Advertisement and Website**

Dear Mr. Hoekstra:

As a national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society in the United States, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) writes to express our deep concerns over your campaign's recent television advertisement and associated website. We urge you to publicly apologize for this advertisement and website; pull the advertisement from future airings; and remove the associated website.

On February 5, 2012, your campaign ran an advertisement on Michigan television stations during the Super Bowl. This advertisement featured an Asian woman on a bicycle who appears to speak in broken English while images of rice fields and Asian music appear in the background. During the advertisement, the woman states, in reference to your opponent, "*Debbie spend so much American money. You borrow more and more from us. Your economy get very weak. Ours get very good. We take your jobs. Thank you, Debbie Spenditnow.*"<sup>1</sup> The associated website, paid for by your campaign, is equally disturbing with imagery including the Chinese flag, Chinese lettering, dragons, lanterns, and the "Great Wall of Debt."<sup>2</sup> In response to the advertisement and website, you have stated that you believe "It's not a stereotype at all."<sup>3</sup>

This advertisement and the associated website perpetuate racial stereotypes that can have grave consequences. In fact, the Asian American community is frequently blamed for the economic woes that this country has faced. The result of such scapegoating can be severe, as evidenced by the murder of Vincent Chin. In 1982, Chin, a Chinese-American, was killed in Detroit by individuals who declared their anger about manufacturing jobs in the United States being lost to Japan. By playing on similar racial biases and stereotypes, this advertisement fosters the perception that individuals in Asia are benefiting from America's economic troubles and can foster discrimination and violence against immigrant communities in the United States.

When xenophobia and racism permeate the political sphere, there can be far-reaching consequences. Xenophobic rhetoric made by political and public figures can foster similar sentiments on the part of the public, and perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes. It can also influence support for policies and practices that target or harm people of color and immigrants. Finally, such rhetoric can further feelings of marginalization and hamper political and civic participation for immigrants and communities of color.

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<sup>1</sup> Video can be viewed here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxw4uZAezal&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxw4uZAezal&feature=player_embedded).

<sup>2</sup> Website can be viewed here: <http://www.debbiespenditnow.com/#>.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Weiner, "Pete Hoekstra's China ad provokes accusations of racism", *The Washington Post* (February 6, 2012). Available at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/pete-hoekstras-china-ad-provokes-accusations-of-racism/2012/02/06/gIQAPD6buQ\\_blog.html?tid=sm\\_twitter\\_washingtonpost](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/pete-hoekstras-china-ad-provokes-accusations-of-racism/2012/02/06/gIQAPD6buQ_blog.html?tid=sm_twitter_washingtonpost)

The Asian American community has often been subjected to xenophobic rhetoric and this is unfortunately true even in the political realm. In fact, over the past ten years, SAALT has observed an alarming increase in insensitive and xenophobic statements in political discourse. SAALT has compiled a range of comments and statements targeting South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in our report, ***From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse***.<sup>4</sup>

We urge your campaign not to promote messages based on such harmful misperceptions about the community. In order to prevent the range of consequences addressed in this letter, we call upon you and your campaign to publicly apologize for this advertisement and website; pull the advertisement from future airings; and remove the associated website. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you to provide further information. Please feel free to contact our Policy Director, Priya Murthy, at 301-270-1855 or via email at [priya@saalt.org](mailto:priya@saalt.org).

Sincerely,



Deepa Iyer, Esq.  
Executive Director



Priya Murthy, Esq.  
Policy Director

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<sup>4</sup> Report available at <http://saalt.org/attachments/1/From%20Macacas%20to%20Turban%20Toppers%20Report.small.pdf>