

# “Speak out”: Biden, Harris decry racism during Atlanta visit

By Jonathan Lemire, Jeff Amy, and Zeke Miller  
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris offered solace to Asian Americans and denounced the scourge of racism at times hidden “in plain sight” as they visited Atlanta, just days after a white gunman killed eight people, most of them Asian-American women.

Addressing the nation after a roughly 80-minute meeting with Asian-American state legislators and other leaders, Biden said it was “heart-wrenching” to listen to their stories of the fear among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders amid what he called a “skyrocketing spike” of harassment and violence against them.

“We have to change our hearts,” he said. “Hate can have no safe harbor in America.”

Biden called on all Americans to stand up to bigotry when they see it, adding: “Our silence is complicity. We cannot be complicit.”

“They’ve been attacked, blamed, scapegoated, and harassed; they’ve been verbally assaulted, physically assaulted, killed,” Biden said of Asian Americans during the coronavirus pandemic.

The president also called the shootings an example of a “public health crisis of gun violence in this country,” as his administration has come under scrutiny from some in his own party for not moving as swiftly as promised on reforming the nation’s gun laws.

Harris, the first person of South Asian descent to hold



**RACISM DECRIED.** People listen to and film senators Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.) and Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.) outside an Emory University campus building after attending a meeting with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris last month in Atlanta. Biden and Harris offered solace to Asian Americans and denounced the scourge of racism at times hidden “in plain sight” as they visited Atlanta, just days after a white gunman killed eight people, most of them Asian-American women. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

communities.

Georgia state representative Marvin Lim, who was among a group of Asian-American leaders who met with Biden and Harris in Atlanta, said the group “didn’t really talk about hate crime sentencing and all of these things there’s been a lot of discussion around.”

“We really talked about the grief people are feeling, the fear people are feeling, the possible responses to that,” Lim said. “The discussion felt very affirming.”

State senator Michelle Au, a Chinese-American Democrat who represents parts of Atlanta’s northern suburbs, was moved by the presence of Harris, saying: “Not only that she was there listening to us, but that she also understood these issues in a very intimate way, that in some ways you can’t teach, that you can’t teach that sort of lived experience. So we felt that she was going to be an incredible advocate on our behalf in the White House.”

Their trip was planned before the shooting, as part of a victory lap aimed at selling the benefits of pandemic relief legislation. But Biden and Harris instead spent much of their visit consoling a community whose growing voting power helped secure their victory in Georgia and beyond.

Activists have seen a rise of racist attacks. Nearly 3,800 incidents have been reported to Stop AAPI Hate, a California-based reporting center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and its partner advocacy groups, between March 19, 2020 and February 28, 2021.

Biden and Harris both implicitly criticized former President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as the “China virus.”

“For the last year we’ve had people in positions of incredible power scapegoating Asian Americans,” said Harris, “people with the biggest pulpits, spreading this kind of hate.”

“We’ve always known words have consequences,” Biden said. “It is the ‘coronavirus.’ Full stop.”

In his first primetime address to the nation as president last month — five days before the Atlanta killings at three metro-area massage businesses — Biden called attacks on Asian Americans “un-American.”

Biden also used the visit to tour the headquarters of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where he received a briefing on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and delivered a pep talk to the agency’s scientists.

“We owe you a gigantic debt of gratitude and we will for a long, long, long time,” Biden said, adding that under his administration, “science is back” driving policy to combat the virus.

Though the originally planned political event to tout the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill was delayed, Biden still met with Georgia voting rights advocate Stacey Abrams, Democrats’ likely 2022 candidate for governor, as Republicans in the state legislature push several proposals to make it harder to vote in the state.

“The battle for the right to vote is never, ever over,” Biden said. “It’s not over here in this state of Georgia. So we’re gonna fight again.”

He also met with newly minted Democratic senators Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock and Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms.

As the fastest-growing racial demographic in the U.S. electorate, Asian Americans are gaining political influence across the country. In California, two Korean-American Republican women made history with their congressional victories. The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, typically dominated by Democrats, has its largest roster ever, including Asian American and Pacific Islander members and others who represent significant numbers of Asian Americans.

“We’re becoming increasingly more visible and active in the political ecosystem,” said Au, a Democrat who represents part of the growing, diversifying suburbs north of Atlanta. Yet, Au said, “What I’ve heard personally, and what I have felt, is that people sometimes don’t tend to listen to us.”

Au said a White House spotlight, especially amid tragedy, is welcomed by a community often overshadowed in national conversations about diversity. She noted Trump and other Republicans merely brushed off charges of racism when they dubbed the coronavirus the “China virus” because of its origins.

“To have them talk about it in this way, so publicly, and to say AAPI, or to note that our communities are going through difficult times, is huge,” Au said.

Miller reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Ben Nadler and Bill Barrow contributed to this report.

national office, said that while the motive of the shooter remains under investigation, these facts are clear: Six of the eight killed were of Asian descent and seven of them were women.

“Racism is real in America. And it has always been. Xenophobia is real in America, and always has been. Sexism, too,” she said. “The president and I will not be silent. We will not stand by. We will always speak out against violence, hate crimes, and discrimination, wherever and whenever it occurs.”

She added that everyone has “the right to be recognized as an American. Not as the other, not as them. But as us.”

Before leaving Washington, Biden declared his support for the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, a bill that would strengthen the government’s reporting and response to hate crimes and provide resources to Asian-American

## One Good Thing: An artist preserves Wuhan’s COVID memories

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pair to the hospital, Yang came down with a fever and cough and feared she had the virus. In tears, she went to a hospital to get tested and began writing her will. After what she calls the longest hour of her life waiting for the results, she was given the all-clear.

One year on, Wuhan has largely returned to normal, its streets bustling with shoppers, its nightclubs throbbing until dawn, and pensioners dancing to a Chinese rendition of a Katy Perry song along the neon-lit Yangtze River. Only the face masks that residents dutifully wear provide a visual reminder of the pandemic’s impact.

“What I see is the unity of our city, our nation. I find that I am really very proud of being a Chinese,” Yang said, expressing a widely held sentiment that has been strongly encouraged by the government, which some have accused of mishandling the initial stage of the outbreak and allowing it to spread around the world.

An exhibition she organized last year at a gallery she runs brought together 23 artists with 60 pieces of artwork related to the coronavirus.

Her efforts have won plaudits from Wuhan media and residents. The exhibition “crystallized every touching moment of the pandemic,” said entrepreneur and friend

Michael Liu.

“Unifying art and thoughts, and taking action, is something that many of us cannot do,” he said.

Yang is currently working on a wall-size aerial view of Wuhan under lockdown, with individual residents represented by black ink dots. It’s an expression of their unity in pulling through the crisis, as well as unseen pain.

She senses that pain still in speaking with residents and survivors who have become depressed or retreated from social life.

“Some people are slowly trying to recover, just to come out of this shadow. Then there are some who can’t get out, because this virus and disaster really took away those closest to them,” Yang said.

For now, she is focused on making up for the pandemic’s lost time, working on her painting, managing her gallery, and preparing for upcoming exhibits. The pandemic, she said, is a reminder of how precious that time can be: “Life is really very fragile and small.”

*Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through The Conversation U.S. The AP is solely responsible for this content. “One Good Thing” is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small.*

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Difficulty level: Medium #87231

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #84256 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

5	8	9	6	4	3	2	7	1
7	2	4	5	1	8	6	3	9
1	6	3	7	2	9	5	8	4
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9	1	6	8	7	2	4	5	3
2	3	7	4	6	5	1	9	8
6	7	1	9	8	4	3	2	5
3	9	2	1	5	6	8	4	7
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## Underlying conditions and vaccinations

Starting March 29 (or earlier for some counties), adults age 45-64 with one or more of the following underlying conditions are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Down syndrome
- Heart conditions such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
- Immunocompromised state from solid organ transplant or HIV
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus
- Obesity (BMI ≥ 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Pregnancy (16 and older)

