



AMIDST UNCERTAINTY, ASIANS FIND “HOME” THROUGH GUNS

Photo from Colin Wong



Photo from Miriam Chung

Left: Miriam Chung, at a shooting range, is mulling a gun purchase. Above: Colin Wong tells his daughters, “First, walk away, then use pepper spray. Self defense is a state of mind.”

By Mahlon Meyer
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

The flat, cold metal grip was reassuring in his hand.

Xiaohu Qian had not touched a gun since college when the Chinese government, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, whisked students away to military camps for train-

ing. But living in the United States now, working as a Microsoft software engineer, he felt the brunt of the pandemic with the absence of government.

“Even Costco was out of water, rice, and toilet paper, and I knew that this was a sign that the government would not be there for us if it couldn’t even ensure a supply chain,” he said, asking for a pseud-

onym because of his work. “But guns were plentiful.”

Thus, like thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of Asians and Asian Americans in our region, he became a gun owner for the first time recently.

“They basically felt unsafe,” said one Chinese community leader, who knows a half-dozen individuals who recently purchased guns. She also asked for anonymity given privacy concerns.

At Low Price Guns, in Bel-

levue, where Qian purchased a Sig Sauer P320, the manager, who asked to go only by his first name, Rick, said that the clientele is usually 30% Asian. But during the first six months of the pandemic, that rose to 75-80%.

“There were lines out the door every day, it was a whirlwind,” he said. “We saw a huge uptick and sold thousands of guns. They cleaned us out.”

(see GUNS on 15)

Vietnamese American woman files suit against neighbor



Thi Pham (right) with her attorney, Jeff Campiche

Photo from PR INK, Inc.

Thi Pham of Shoreline says she has endured years of harassment and threats from her white neighbor—because of her race.

Now she has filed a civil lawsuit against Jan Myers, 72, who was arrested earlier this year after Pham recorded Myers, on April 5, using racially derogatory and threatening statements.

(see LAWSUIT on 11)



Kshama Sawant

Photo from Seattle City Council

Push for recall Sawant effort

The Recall Sawant campaign is gearing up for its final signature-gathering push.

Last week, it said it hit a “significant milestone” with volunteers collecting more than 13,000 unverified signatures. The goal is to collect 14,000 signed petitions through August before submitting to King County Elections.

If it qualifies for the ballot, King County Elections will assign a date for the recall election, likely sometime between Nov. 11–Dec. 26.

“We know that Sawant will go to no end to protect her political career, but this campaign is about holding Sawant accountable for her record of legal and ethical violations while in office, and we will not be deterred,” the campaign said in a news release. ■

Talking trade with Ambassador Tai



Ambassador Katherine Tai

By Janice Nesamani
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Described as calm, respectful, and creative, it’s no surprise that Katherine Tai’s appointment to the position of United States Trade Representative (USTR) on March 18, 2021 was approved 98-0 by a usually-polarized Senate. However, what makes her appointment celebratory is that Tai is the first Asian American woman to serve in this position.

Calling the timing of her appointment challenging would be an understatement. Tai must broker deals that had spiraled into tariff wars under the previous administration while the U.S. prepares to recover from the pandemic and the Biden-Harris

government aims to Build Back Better. Tai’s job is to negotiate trade deals that open the U.S. economy to new opportunities, while safeguarding the interests of our workers.

On Aug. 5, 2021, Tai visited the Washington State University (WSU) Breadlab and met with labor leaders and union representatives to understand their needs that will inform the policies she crafts.

Immigrant perspective

Tai’s parents were born in China, moved to Taiwan, and then immigrated to the U.S. She was born in Connecticut and grew up in Washington, D.C. Fluent in Mandarin, Tai graduated

(see TAI on 13)

(GUNS from 1)

A study by California State University, San Bernardino, found that anti-Asian hate crimes rose by nearly 150% last year.

While there is no official data on firearm purchases by Asian Americans, a survey by the National Shooting Sports Foundation indicated that Asian Americans bought 42% more firearms and ammunition in the first six months of 2020 compared to the previous year.

Interviews with Asian and Asian American gun purchasers and community leaders here suggest that the pandemic and systemic social ills either contributed to their decision to buy a firearm or, in some cases, changed the way they used it. It was no longer for recreation, but for self-defense.

For Qian, during the first months of the pandemic, he threw himself into a maelstrom of educational events, organized on the Chinese social media app WeChat. Microsoft engineers and visitors from China would do “team building” by going to shooting ranges, he said.

When friends came in from China, besides the usual rounds of shopping and sightseeing, they would also go in groups to shooting ranges.

Colin Wong, another software engineer, who used to work for Google, arrived from Malaysia two decades ago and saw his coworkers in Texas reading gun magazines.

“I thought they were crazy, but now it’s come full circle,” he said.

Wong began purchasing firearms long before the pandem-

ic. His interest in hiking, after moving to Seattle, led him to consider hunting.

“I thought, I’m doing all this walking and come home empty-handed, what if I could come back with some food?” he said.

But it was the gradual increase in social instability, culminating in the pandemic, that heightened his desire to use his weapons for self-defense.

Citing the homeless problem in downtown Seattle, and that the police are apparently hamstrung from acting by the city council, Wong recently concealed a small Glock in a belt holster when he took his family out to dinner there.

In this sense, Wong’s concerns hewed him closer to the experiences of marginalized communities in the U.S. where gun ownership is sometimes met with a feeling of reluctant necessity, according to Christine Leibbrand, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington.

“These experiences seem to be especially prevalent among people whom the U.S. institutions are failing—particularly Black individuals who report that law enforcement offers little support to their communities and, as we have seen, can be important risks to Black individuals’ lives,” she said.

In a perhaps parallel way, Asians and Asian Americans that have bought guns expressed concerns for their families in what appears to them an increasingly lawless atmosphere.

Wong, for instance, is encouraging his three teenage daughters to learn to shoot.



Low Price Guns saw an uptick in sales to Asians and Asian Americans from 30% to 75-80% during the first part of the pandemic

Miriam Chung, an entrepreneur with her own investing company, is worried about the safety of her young son and daughter. When she was growing up in the eastern coastal part of Malaysia, her father, who worked for the government, had a shotgun he would use to scare off intruders.

Now, living in Olympia, her husband, an ER doctor, is often away during evenings, and she wishes she had something to protect her and her kids. Homeless people have wandered onto their property repeatedly over the past several years.

But her 12-year-old son is always “getting into” her stuff. Through her husband’s work, she has known of many incidents of accidental shootings. And she worries about her son getting access to any firearms she might buy.

One gun shop owner, who

preferred not to be named, said she recognized the need for education among the huge increase in first-time gun buyers among Asians and Asian Americans. She has laid out large warnings in multiple Asian languages in her store, urging new gun owners to buy safes or lock boxes.

Rick, the manager at Low Price Guns, said that despite language barriers, he always emphasized the importance of training and would write down the names of shooting ranges where they had classes.

As Chung mulls over the purchase of a firearm, she also is hoping to learn more. She recently decided to take her son shooting to educate him about guns.

“I want him to learn to respect them, like you have to respect the sea,” she said. “It can kill you.”

Coming from cultures where

most people don’t have access to guns, many Asians were intrigued by the opportunities here. And in many cases, the pandemic added an element of uncertainty that actually moved them to make a purchase.

Qian said he practiced dry firing a rifle every day, and only at the end was allowed to shoot a few live rounds. After coming to the U.S., he became fascinated with guns “from an engineering standpoint.” It was not until the pandemic that he made up his mind to buy one.

Gun store owners and managers say that the wide availability of guns—they can be purchased by those with work or even student visas—also contributed to the rush.

“It was everybody under the sun,” said Rick. ■

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Photo by Mahlon Meyer

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