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**Statement from Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus
Chair Delegate Mark Keam on the thirtieth anniversary of the
beginning of the Los Angeles Riots**

April 29, 1992, is remembered as the first day of one of the worst rioting and disruption in American history. It is also a critical turning point for many Asian Americans, especially Korean Americans, who saw their dreams literally burn to the ground.

Thirty years ago today, a jury in Southern California acquitted four white Los Angeles Police Department officers of using excessive force against Rodney King, an African American motorist who was seen on videotape being severely beaten by these law enforcement officials.

While the controversial verdict in this criminal matter was clearly unfair, the massive sense of injustice impacted countless lives beyond those of Mr. King and his family.

On April 29, protesters gathered in front of the police headquarters in the predominantly African American neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. As the crowd became rowdy, they began taking out their anger against random victims. But by the time the riots moved to nearby Koreatown, the rampage took an ugly turn against Korean American store owners.

When the police retreated and other government officials failed to respond, the rioting, destruction, arson, and looting continued, resulting in 63 deaths, over 1,000 injured, and over 3,000 properties damaged.

Among the worst hit were the Korean American community, which suffered its own casualty and injuries as well as having over 1,000 small businesses destroyed at the estimated damage cost of half a billion dollars.

Although Korean Americans have been in the United States for over a century, April 29 (4-2-9 or "Sa I Gu" as it is referred to in the Korean language) became a wakeup call for this immigrant community.

Having moved to Southern California as a teenager, I was working in downtown Los Angeles on that day. I witnessed with my own eyes the riots that destroyed a large portion of Koreatown where I lived.

I saw flames and smelled smoke from buildings that once housed mom and pop businesses run by fellow Korean immigrants. A friend's mother was shot in her leg, and another friend's father was beaten up inside his own store.

By the third or fourth day, it became clear that no government institution would come to their aid even though the community had begged for support. The Korean American community recognized the need to empower themselves by breaking out from the insular enclave, building coalitions with other minority communities, and seeking change with policymakers.

In the aftermath of *Sa / Gu*, I redoubled my commitment to assisting communities that have no voice in our political process and dedicated my career to public service.

Today, Asian American immigrants continue to face inequities, but 30 years after the LA Riots, I am heartened to see many Asian American and Pacific Islander elected officials and other advocates for the community working at all levels of government.

In Virginia, I am proud to join members of the Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus to fight for fairness and equity for the AAPI communities in the Commonwealth. We have yet to achieve all of our goals, but we certainly have come a long way since 1992.

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The Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus (VAAPIC) is a legislative organization recognized by the General Assembly to serve as a collaborative voice for Virginia's Asian American and Pacific Islander communities by identifying public issues of interest and to develop formal positions, facilitate discussions, and advocate for policy outcomes.