What role does the Congressional leader play in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)?

My role in APEC 2011 USA would be to ensure the availability of the budgetary funds for this opportunity. Representatives do not hold a formal role in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. However, we are working closely with the host committee and various organizations of APEC 2011 to see out the fruition of the preparation.

APEC is an excellent opportunity to educate the twenty one member economies and rest of the world about the Pacific and our roles.

Personally, what do you hope to see from APEC for the State of Hawaii?

What I hope to see from APEC is recognition of Hawaii as a State and APEC visitors learning about our people, culture and values we hold.

At any level, relationships are critical. In that sense, APEC is crucial, as it will serve a forum in which world leaders can come together, face to face, and build those relationships. It is one thing to make a policy decision from afar when you can’t see or hear the person your decision is affecting. It is another thing entirely when that person is sitting in front of you, talking and interacting.

In Washington D.C. although the politics may appear viciously partisan, polarized, and unyielding, at the end of the day, we still value our relationships with each other. That’s what it’s about, and once we can get to a place a mutual respect with one another on a global scale, the world will be a better place. Thus, APEC is going to be one of the preliminary first steps to facilitate the relationships that will make that possible.

How should people of Hawaii prepare for APEC?

One thing that people have to expect is the traffic, and that there will be slight inconveniences. The arrival of Presidents and Ministers will be a security sensitive component of this whole event.

However, the people of Hawaii have to also realize and focus more on the long-term benefit of APEC and how it can impact Hawaii in the future. All the countries will not only see our ability to facilitate and to be able to enhance the trade idea, but also truly recognize the way Hawaii is by our understanding of the cultural differences.

The term “Asian” does not really exist in Hawaii, because what we talk about is the true ethnic group of the people on this island. We understand the differences between a Japanese and an Okinawan or a Cantonese and a Chinese. Food is also a big part of us on how we identify ourselves and that’s what makes Hawaii unique.

Therefore what I am really hoping to see is that when all the countries leave Hawaii, they leave it with a sense that we are such a unique place and that we appreciate the diversity of cultures and traditions.

What wisdom and advice does your culture offer the new generation that is of real value?

To remember one’s past and where you come from is very important. My family worked in a sugar plantation in Waianae when I was growing up. Waianae is a very down to earth area of the island. People knew my family and we knew the people in the community. Even though the community has changed over time we still care about our community and cherish the memories growing up in Waianae.

To appreciate the wisdoms and values of your family and culture, more stories need to be told. We need to think about the history. I went to Waianae Elementary School and during that time, we didn’t have a Hawaiian culture, language or history course. Hawaiian is the second official language of our State but it was prohibited from being spoken. How could you prohibit the language that practices oral history?

If we don’t try to understand where we come from, it’s even harder to understand what it is that we are protecting and why we are protecting it. Stories maintain the uniqueness that makes us who we are.