

SPEAKINGOUT

Support businesses owned by the AAPI community

Your Turn

Sarah Clark and Jo-Ann Yoo
Guest columnists

Rochester is a city filled with diversity and entrepreneurial spirit. The Flower City is also home to a growing and thriving community of Asian American small business owners who are vital to the local economy and our cultural identity. As we navigate the post-COVID era, we must recognize their contributions to this ever-evolving economic landscape and invest in more constructive dialogue, fostering growth and community resilience.

According to the Asian American Federation’s Data Center, the Rochester region is now home to 1,113 Asian-owned businesses, providing employment to 8,331 individuals. Concurrently, the Asian population has seen a notable growth of 40 percent. These statistics underscore the vital role played by immigrant communities, particularly the Asian American community, in enriching the diverse and vibrant fabric of Rochester’s local economy.

Every growing community needs assistance; the Asian American community is no exception. Small business owners in the Asian American community need more help, especially in language accessibility. Business owners who are not proficient in English struggle to access loans and other vital support for their development. Empowering and integrating these communities by providing a language-friendly support system will demonstrate Rochester’s commitment to the success and well-being of all its community members.

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A holistic approach is required to tackle this issue, starting with implementing a comprehensive referral system. A referral system would serve as a structured network connecting AAPI businesses and non-profits with services providing essential resources, such as digital literacy, financial guidance, online visibility, insurance options, and policy insights, all in a culturally appropriate framework. Immigrant business owners often find it challenging to access support services if they are not culturally appropriate. The City could also facilitate collaboration among merchants so these diverse groups can advocate for their interests and participate in policy-making that affects their businesses and communities.

Small business owners grapple with substantial expenses for rent and supplies, typically relying on traditional loans to help cover them. However, immigrants often face barriers, such as a lack of credit history or discriminatory lending practices, making these loans inaccessible. Facilitating micro-financing or emergency funding is essential to foster community well-being and empowerment.

Rochester has an opportunity to foster an environment where all business owners can thrive regardless of their ethnicity or gender and, at the same time, contribute to the economic and cultural prosperity of the city.

It is time we acknowledge the true value of our vibrant and diverse communities and invest in their growth and resilience. Only together can we pave the way for a more prosperous and inclusive Rochester.

Jo-Ann Yoo is the executive director of the Asian American Federation. Assembly Member Sarah Clark represents the 136th Assembly District of New York State.

Parents shouldn’t have to choose baby or work



Your Turn
Eman Quotah
Guest columnist

Sixteen years ago, I went into early labor, was prescribed hospital bed rest and then gave birth to my son three months early. He stayed in the neonatal intensive care unit for two months, and it was one of the hardest times of my and my husband’s lives. I visited the hospital twice a day and pumped breast milk frequently at home while trying to recover mentally and physically from a very difficult birth. My husband worked and visited our son in the evenings.

When our baby came home, we didn’t want to send him to day care for the first year because he was at high risk for infections like RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). My parental leave ran out by the time my son reached 40 weeks gestational age, and I was lucky and grateful to have managers who worked with me to figure out how to give me the time I needed to care for my family, allowed me to work part time for nearly a year, and let me come back to work full time when I was ready.

Two and a half years later, the same employer accommodated me again when my daughter was born nearly two months early. Without their understanding, I could have been out of a job, twice – in the same shoes as Marissa Hughes, the employee who recently accused the trendy Texas bamboo-baby-clothing company Kyte Baby of letting her go after she requested to work remotely while her adopted baby was treated in a neonatal intensive care unit.

Kyte Baby controversy isn’t unique for American parents

After outraged former customers recorded themselves throwing out Kyte Baby outfits and vowing to boycott the company, the CEO apologized twice and the company has said it is reviewing and updating its policies.

The TikTok-fueled controversy showed that consumer pressure can work to make companies create better policies, and perhaps other companies will follow suit. But boycotting Kyte Baby or any other employer won’t change the problem at the crux of this story: Individual employers and families shouldn’t have to figure out how to work around our shoddy systems and policies.

And in a country where 1 in 10 babies



In the United States, 1 in 10 babies is born prematurely. But it’s the only high-income country that does not have mandatory paid leave for parents after a child’s birth or adoption. MIKALA COMPTON/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

is born prematurely, parents shouldn’t have to go back to work if their child is in the NICU or needs care in the first months because they’re worried about running out of leave.

We all want to support parents through pregnancy and birth, but in the United States we don’t have the systems to adequately do that. We’re the only high-income nation that does not have nationwide, mandatory, paid leave for parents after a child’s birth or adoption.

That’s a problem for all new families, but especially when pregnancy and birth don’t go as planned, which is unfortunately the case for too many parents in our nation. We have the highest maternal death rate among affluent countries, and our premature birth rate is also high. On its annual infant and maternal health report card, the March of Dimes last year gave the nation a D+.

If my child came home with that grade, I’d tell them to work harder.

We need paid, long-term parental leave – period

As a nation, we’re not working hard enough to care for women and babies either before or after birth. And we’re not offering leave to everyone equally.

Our federal Family and Medical Leave Act means that some employees get up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave with job protection. And according to the Center for American Progress, only 11 states and Washington, D.C., have passed paid family and medical leave laws.

More than half of Americans lack access to short-term disability insurance often used to pay for maternity leave, and those who make less money or work

part time have the least access.

In other words, our policies are an inequitable patchwork. And families like Hughes’ and mine that face birth complications have needs that are not well addressed by government and company policies.

Paid family leave has been found to have many benefits for child and maternal health and child development, including reducing the likelihood of pre-term and low-weight births. We need paid, long-term family leave policies that ensure families can take the time they need to care for and bond with their infants.

If we don’t put the right systems in place, we lose the opportunity to nurture families at a crucial time and enable them to thrive.

Last month, the House bipartisan working group on paid leave released a draft framework that aims to make leave available to more people through a combination of policies, including tax incentives for small businesses. That’s a start, but of course a draft plan is a long way from passing a bill through a divided Congress.

In its press release announcing it would be revisiting its policies, Kyte Baby said that it “needs to stand by their values of being a woman owned, family company.”

Like people everywhere, Americans love our families. Let’s show our values by putting pressure on our policymakers to make paid family leave a reality for everyone who needs it, including the most vulnerable babies and their families.

Eman Quotah is a communications consultant and novelist in Rockville, Maryland.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Toby Keith fan mourns loss of a great performer

I fell in love with Toby Keith when I heard his song, “Should Have Been A Cowboy.” I was fortunate enough to see him in person on numerous occasions. He was larger than life. He closed all of his concerts with two songs, “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue” and “American Soldier.”

These songs have special meaning to me, as our son was in the Army for 33 years and served in Iraq four times. At one concert that I attended, Keith called a woman up on stage. She was shocked. He asked her where her husband was. She told him that he was in the military and over in Iraq and has been there for 13 months.

Keith surprised her by calling her husband onto the stage. Needless to say, there was not a dry eye there.

When I saw him at the People’s Choice Awards last September, Keith looked quite ill. He sang “Don’t Let the Old Man In.” Well, God called him home on Monday.

There will never be another Toby Keith.
Diane Gowin
Rochester

Reader questions point of column regarding immigration

A recent column talks about “who New Yorkers are,” while advocating a position that many in this state are not supportive of. This seems to happen often in New York state. which, believe it or not, encompasses more than just the five boroughs of New York City.

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The column tries to make the case that entering the United States illegally is somehow the same as actually going through the immigration process. It isn’t.
Charles Belfield
Rochester

More resources needed for all affected by domestic violence

Domestic violence not only has an effect on the people going through it but the people who witness it. Not only are men and women abused, children are as well. Being exposed to this kind of abuse at a young age can cause PTSD. Most victims have no help, so some turn to drugs to make them feel better. It is one of the most common coping mechanisms.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can stay with you for the rest of your life and can be carried on with you forever. I believe more domestic violence laws should be put in place to keep victims safe. More resources should be available for the victims, people who witnessed it, and the abuser.
Tialise Davila
Rochester

Not all renewable energy projects need to be placed in rural areas

As a climate advocate living in a Rochester suburb, I’m not always sure how to react to stories about rural opposition to renewable energy, as described in your Feb. 6 story. I acknowledge that solar and wind developments have an impact and require space. But the fossil fuel industry has local impacts too; and burning oil, coal, and gas is causing the global climate crisis.

Transitioning from fossil fuels is an imperative and must start now. As a suburban homeowner, I don’t expect all of my future renewable energy to come from projects in rural communities. I’d like to see a proliferation of solar and wind installations throughout Monroe County, including on home rooftops. I plan to continue working to reduce my household energy demands to lower the overall need for new energy development.

And I ask, for our planet’s future, that communities throughout rural America be willing to do their part.
Bill Maier
Fairport