

For general release: March 17, 2021

It has come to our attention that use of the offensive term “China Virus” to reference COVID-19 continues in the Missouri legislature, most recently by Representative Brian Seitz. Such terminology is widely acknowledged as racist and creates a false stereotype of blaming Asian Americans for the COVID-19 pandemic. In part due to this harmful rhetoric, Asian Americans in our communities are subjected to racial slurs and attacks. In many instances, these attacks have led to violent assaults and murders being perpetrated upon Asian Americans. The use of this dog whistle is simply unacceptable, and we demand it end.

We expect our elected representatives to exhibit compassion and empathy while representing the interests of ALL citizens of Missouri, including Asian Americans. Rep. Seitz and others using the unacceptable term fail to live up to those standards. The continued use of the term is at best willful blindness to the effect these words have, or at worst, deliberate use of racist rhetoric for political gain at the expense of Asian Americans.

While some diseases were named after geographic locations in the past, this practice has consistently brought negative consequences upon those nations, economies, and people. We have seen this unfold before our eyes with escalating racism and fearmongering towards people of Asian descent around the world since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no legitimate reason to use this racist rhetoric when a neutral, widely accepted term is available.

Missouri is home to hundreds of thousands of people of Asian descent, including business and civic leaders, students, families, and other hardworking citizens trying to weather the pandemic like everyone else. The Asian American Bar Association of Kansas City, St. Louis Asian American Chamber of Commerce, Missouri Asian American Bar Association, and Organization of Chinese Americans – St. Louis denounce Rep. Seitz’s use of the term “China Virus” and expect him to seek out the appropriate education and guidance to gain understanding. We ask you and the other members of the Missouri legislature to take part in combating racism and promoting unity.

