

PETE HOEKSTRA MOCKS HIS ASIAN-AMERICAN NEIGHBORS

When I first saw Crazy Pete Hoekstra's racist ad, I thought the woman in it—who is supposed to depict a Chinese woman who speaks English well—looked more Thai or Laotian than Han Chinese. And while Hoekstra claims that her parents are “100% Chinese” there are unconfirmed reports that the actress is actually Laotian-American.

Which would be particularly galling, given that Hoekstra's home town has a significant population of Laotian-Americans (note, Holland Township is basically the northern suburbs of Holland city).

Holland Township's population is 10.1 percent Asian, which includes mainly Laotian and Cambodian families, but also Filipino and Vietnamese. That's more than double the concentration of the U.S., and five times more than Holland city.

Some Laotians have converted to Christianity, but many still practice Buddhism. The Holland area has two Buddhist temples – one on 112th Avenue and another on Port Sheldon – each with several monks.

Both temples have around 120 members, according to Nace Phimthasak, President of the Lao Buddhist Temple of Holland. But as manufacturing companies downsized, many families moved out of state, putting an added burden on other members, who continue to support the temple financially.

Laotian refugees came to Michigan in the aftermath of the Vietnam war and were often

sponsored by Dutch Reform Church
communities—Hoekstra's own faith.

The Laotian community (along with the growing Latino population) gives the Holland area an increasingly diverse feel. Not only can you get superb "Thai" food, but where I lived on the edge of the cornfields and just a mile or so from the MI office of the right wing Family Research Council, I lived closer to a Buddha statute than to one of Jesus (the statue was at the community center described as being planned in the article—in thoroughly American fashion, it watches over a sand volleyball court where members play for hours on warm Sundays).

Hoekstra's ad was bigoted and wrong in any case. But it turns out he may have been making fun not of a distant Asian community in California or China, but his neighbors and former constituents in Holland.

If Hoekstra can't even figure out that his neighbors are good Americans, then he's not the guy to be fighting to defend the American Dream.