

## CHAPTER ONE

“This better be a matter of life or death,” George growled through groggy sleep, answering his landline without checking the caller identification. It was a few minutes after midnight on Tuesday, January 6, 2015 – just hours before the 33-year-old lawmaker and the rest of his colleagues would be sworn-in on the first day of the now Republican-controlled 114<sup>th</sup> Congress following his Party’s pivotal mid-term election victories two months earlier.

Although George managed to prop his toned taut lean body on one muscular arm while pressing the receiver to his ear, he couldn’t make out the caller’s voice, which was almost blocked-out by an eruption of cellphone and iPad alerts from the electronics spread across his king-sized bed. Without answering any of the devices he kept twisting around, glancing at them through his half-opened almond eyes, still half asleep but wondering what in the hell was going on.

“What did you say?” he mumbled through a yawn.

“I said its life, George, and death, if you don’t choose to talk about life today after you’re sworn-in...” the soft but hesitant voice halted for his response.

“Who the Hell is this?”

“It’s Victoria...darling...good morning.”

Now George was fully awake and stunned. “You’re calling from Beijing?”

It's not only questionable for a foreigner to call the home of a U. S. Member of Congress but risqué if it's also the incoming chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and racy if the caller is both a foreign and romantic interest. But more than her actual call Victoria's tone was unfamiliar – one George had never heard before.

“Yes...I wanted to be the first to tell you – ”

“What? What? Tell me what? I'm supposed to – ”

“ – be on the House floor soon. That's after you scrape yourself up off your own floor – ”

“What the – ”

“Beijing just called all of the U.S. treasury bills it owns.”

George's heartbeats skipped up to his throat, choking his voice as he sprang upright. Victoria continued with her calm, cotton like-first aid advice.

“When you get on the House floor later this morning...consider giving a speech after you're sworn-in. Assure Congress and the American people they are an investment, not objects. Convince them Beijing does not own them, nor you...my darling. Have a beautiful day.”

A burst of insane pounding downstairs on his Capitol Hill townhome door snapped George into frantic motion, slamming down the phone receiver, scooping-up his electronic devices, springing downstairs, flipping-on televisions and radios, and then swinging open the weighty entry doors. Several crazed, night-clothes clad neighbors – all congress members – spilled-in, screaming like dozens of shocked sheep encircling their shepherd.

“We’re screwed! Wall Street’s gonna crash! Whatta we gonna do? What happens now? Do we even have that kinda money to pay up? Suppose everybody starts calling their debt! Talk to Beijing, George, you gotta talk to ‘em now – make ‘em back down! Talk to ‘em George – they’ll listen to you!”

“Beijing is also listening to McConnell and Boehner,” George quipped – referring to the incoming Senate and House majority leaders – and grabbed the hallway landline. “I’m guessing Beijing wants to let those two know they can try and block Obama on the climate change deal they just signed but you can’t block us. Hold tight, guys, I gotta call my staff chief. Calm down, make some tea. You know where everything is. Then we’ll talk.”

While the crowd turned towards the kitchen one of them balked. “God damn, man! The United States is about to turn into the world’s largest Chinese restaurant and you want us to make tea?”

Pouncing on his colleague, George clasped his hand around the congressman's throat, lifted him like a rag and pinned him against the hallway wall with his heaving athletic six-foot frame. Squeezing the wriggling resister's neck, George pressed his face eye-to-eye with the congressman. In low, slow words he snorted: "My father is a Chinese restaurant owner...all his life he took care of himself, his house, his family, his community...and we never went broke or hungry because he knew how to run his business and adapt when there was trouble...if the United States ends-up running like his business, this country won't go broke or hungry either. Now if you want to work with his son...if you want his son to talk to his ancestral land...start by going to the kitchen...and make some fucking tea."

George released his death grip. The resister slipped jelly-like onto the floor and wiggled his way to the others cowering in the hallway; everyone turned and herded into the kitchen on George's silent command.

Having one of the largest townhomes on the block afforded the legislator not only enough space for the crowd but also options for privacy. George stared for several moments into empty space, stood still for a moment, turned and slid into the adjacent den, pulled the double mahogany doors shut, leaned his frame into the protective ingress and just breathed.

And breathed...and breathed. Deeper. Deeper. Deeper...as his father had taught him, not his sports therapists. He wished his father was here to see how his only son – his *tianzi* – just defended him, and used him as an example to deal with an unbelievable crisis; he choked back unexpected twinges of longing...and fear.

George's tiny bout of trepidation vanished at the persistence of repetitive, ululating-sounding ringtones of his den's landline. Smiling, he thought how odd to answer traditional phones instead of his electronic devices during an active nightmare. Again, he ignored the caller identification.

“Yes.”

“ ‘Yes’ you know what’s happening, or ‘yes’ you know what I’m planning, Boss?” It was his chief of staff, Thomas, whom he was just about to contact.

“Both. But I’ll draft the comments I’ll make on the House floor.”

“Now is a helluva time not to trust me.”

“Now is a helluva time to distrust me,” George smirked, twisting Thomas’ slight indignation over the legislator usurping a job pre-ordained for him. “Time to wake everyone up. Videoconference in 30 minutes. Tell Dianne I’ll hold off any news interviews until she and I talk.”

“Wowwwww! China needs to flex its muscle more often! You’re waiting to clear interviews before you talk to the media?”

Managing to muster bits of relief, George engaged Thomas in his fleeting humor.

“I’m glad you can find some upside in this.”

“And you can’t? Now I know why you want to talk to Dianne first!”

“Don’t make me laugh, Tom. This is perplexing.” He was referring to Victoria’s phone call more than the reason for her call.

“Perplexing? What’s there to understand? Both Boehner and McConnell’s been spitting venom since Obama signed that climate change treaty. Green Truth’s on a mission to get a Senate hearing on the treaty. And don’t get me started on – ”

“I won’t. Get going on setting-up the videoconference.”

Surprised at the interruption, Thomas still complied. “Done.”

George replaced the receiver in slow motion and cupped his hands for several moments to eliminate the pinch of fear from remembering why he couldn’t tell Thomas why he was puzzled. Why Victoria, not a Treasury Department official, first contacted him. Now rubbing his hands, he wanted to make sure all hesitation was gone before facing his colleagues.

George hadn’t felt fear in a long, long time; so long he’d forgotten what to do to control it. What was it someone once told him – FEAR stood for “False Evidence Appearing Real”? That doesn’t work – the financial evidence was real: mainland China and Hong Kong both held around a total of two trillion dollars in U.S. securities, more than any other foreign investors recorded.

C'mon, George, he pushed himself, what are you afraid of? This is historic, just like your landlines, and they're still around, they're still working. Then it clicked: History. Roosevelt. Franklin Delano Roosevelt - the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Didn't he just stifle the fear of a colleague when he maligned Chinese restaurants? Don't make up something clever, George, this is history – quote Roosevelt – history does repeat itself, but this time, he – George Washington Li – will direct it, and use his economics sense to figure it out.

Besides, George schemed, it's very important just to look as if I'm in control. No, it's not just important, it's critical...because, as I always say: perception is power.

Still, George was a little confused. He knew Victoria risked calling him; she isn't a high-ranking Communist Party official, just the granddaughter of one. The way she phrased her “advice” was almost not to offend him, to make sure he wasn't indignant at any suggestion of being Beijing's puppet.

He figured the Communist Central Party had a plan for the redeemed treasuries money but Victoria notifying him and not telling him the plan didn't make any political sense. Yet.

Hour One since the call from Beijing. Opening bell for Wall Street at Nine-thirty; Congress scheduled to convene at Noon. George drafted a mental list of priorities for the next ten hours: monitor stock futures and foreign markets; one broadcast interview for the media to pool; and draft his speech.

He exited the den, strode into the kitchen, and smiled at his bewildered colleagues. Someone handed him a steaming herbal brew which was quick to prepare since George always kept a filled kettle on the stove in honor of his great-grandfather's practice of making sure potable water was always available.

"Thanks," he whispered with a wicked smile, wrapping his hands around the porcelain teacup. "Can I see a menu?"

Everyone froze. George's strategic laughter melted their icy response. "We can't function if we're afraid, guys." Then, testing his experimental approach and logic, he whispered again: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

As if on cue, everyone's shoulders softened, dropping tension and tightness, glancing around at each other as if hearing the words for the first time in their lives.

Smiling with encouragement, George proceeded with scheming caution. "I don't know why Beijing called the debt, but I do know we've got to be brave. We can't show, nor act, like we're defeated. Like this is a terrorist attack. I haven't talked with Treasury yet, but I'm sure we'll pay up. We have to – we're obligated."

"Won't that break the bank?"

"Let Treasury brief us. Whatever Treasury says, that's what we repeat. And that's all we say, no matter how anybody asks or twists questions, or tweets rumors, or posts false information," George instructed. "We have to speak with one voice."



“Then level with us,” the congressman George choked demanded. “Do we survive – does the United States have an ice cube’s chance in Hell to come out of this?”

“Yes.” George delivered his one-word reply with convincing confidence. Everyone hung on his silence as if waiting to hear winning lottery numbers next. He sipped his tea to suppress an indulgent, manipulative smile.

“Why do you think China’s leader – Xi Jinping – signed that climate change deal with Obama?” Deferential silence. “Better still, why do you think Obama signed the treaty without congressional approval?” Only the sound of the humming refrigerator hung in the air.

“Both leaders need to flex their political muscles. Both leaders need to take steps to boost their economies not break them. Think, guys – what drives the economic engine both countries need right now? Fuel. What’s allowing people to put more money in their pockets, had a little more to spend this past holiday season and travel more? Depressed gas prices from excessive oil production.”

“Are you saying Obama and Xi are trying to break the oil cartels?”

“Hell no,” George scoffed. “I’m saying Obama and Xi seized the moment to ride the tide of public sentiment toward alternative fuels. When oil – and all energy is cheaper – you have money for other essentials.”

His colleagues’ intrigued silence egged him on.

“Coal keeps the lights on for now,” George continued, “but not forever. Besides...new sources of energy mean new jobs...no more generations of coal miners facing death every day. In both countries.”

“And China? Why are they waiting so long to comply? They gave themselves 15 years to cut their pollution – ”

“And pump-up their use of alternative fuel by 20 percent during that same time,” George jumped in. “Think of the possibilities. Know how many U.S. companies can get them there?”

“Do you?”

Once again silence hung the air. George sipped again, suppressing indulgence once more. Now Victoria’s “advice” clicked.

“Of course I don’t know, but I have an idea how, and I’ll say it on the House floor.”

Everyone started baaa-ing for details, but George herded them toward the exit. “All I’ve got to say is, this is an investment not a withdrawal,” he shouted over their noisy departure. He locked the entry door behind the last colleague, swung around, pressed his body onto the entrance and punched the air with a revealing “Yes!”

Assure Congress and the American people they are an investment, Victoria said.  
Capital – Venture Capital.

Beijing would probably use the redeemed funds to invest in start-ups and existing businesses to meet its climate change treaty goals – similar to options the USCC, a congressional panel, the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission – recommended the federal government should study.

Nearly a billion dollars – the United States’ own money – to fund, not subsidize, countless American companies and endless American jobs for both countries to switch to alternative fuel consumption. And once those start-ups begin producing, the world would be their market – not just China and the United States.

George remembered reading reports when Beijing signed the climate change treaty that indicated China needs to add 800-1,000 gigawatts of alternative power by the year 2030 – the deadline for Beijing’s compliance to limit its carbon emissions. He was aware of Chinese Leader Xi Jinping’s desire to reform his country’s economy; the legislator considered a venture capital fund a clever risk management move on President’s Xi’s part, if that was the plan. And, with the Chinese economy slowing, the legislator figured it was more an act of desperation, since image was everything to Beijing, as the country deals with rising financial instability in its stock markets along with perennial smog alerts during the Winter.

With a bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, the games would coincide with Beijing's annual mandate for drivers and factories to cut back on transportation and production to clear the air – not an incentive to attract visitors for the world's ultimate sports competition.

If George was right, a venture capital investment is long-term, which meant there was another piece of the political puzzle he had to solve. Both Obama and Xi knew continuity would be the success of the climate change agreement; the next U.S. President would have to finish what Obama started.

Well, that was one reason why Beijing would initiate a venture capital fund, but there was no way to ensure a successor in the Oval Office would not undo with executive power what President Obama did with executive power.

Or was there?

Convince them Beijing does not own them...or you, my darling.

Opportunity. China's action is a personal opportunity.

Now the thought of another U.S. President – Lyndon Baines Johnson – flashed creativity: seize the moment. He recalled from his studies how he felt President Johnson seized opportunities to steer the country through domestic crises.

George's mind and thoughts raced each other: suggesting to the American people, Congress, Wall Street and the world that China is investing venture capital funds to boost dual economies while cutting greenhouse gas emissions is one thing.

The idea alone is exceptional. The person discussing the investment must also be extraordinary and proactive. A leader...like a President.

George astonished himself; since Victoria contacted him, and not Treasury, this is a chance to appear presidential.

His thoughts goaded him to an emotional cliff: since Obama's successor needs to continue what Obama started...this is a break to test the presidential waters.

Standing at the edge of imaginative abyss, George's thoughts gelled: Beijing's action is giving him the opportunity to seize the moment and take his first steps toward getting elected as the next President of the United States.

Hour Two. Dazed from his self-deduction, George masqueraded his ultimate goal by focusing on immediate concerns during his staff videoconference. He didn't reveal Victoria's call; he convinced his workers his "information" and "sources" were legitimate, and focused on setting-up a crisis center with his staffers in his district office to handle all matters at his home base in San Francisco.

Hours Three and Four. Confidence calls with Treasury officials confirm Beijing wanted to redeem only short-term Treasury bills – securities of only up to a year in maturity. George breathed sighs of encouraging relief, interpreting the action as a personal confirmation China continued to hold long-term notes and bonds as an ironic sign Beijing needed the United States' money for its own solvency.

Even though he felt China only called part of its U.S. holdings to save itself, George knew better to ignore possible parallels with a well-known Chinese plan to conquer America by nonmilitary means – Unrestricted Warfare, a book written by two Chinese colonels sixteen years ago.

A Sino-blueprint described as a plan for “war beyond the battlefield”, the military officials outlined strategy to neutralize U.S. cyber, government and economic targets consistently during peacetime instead of sporadic military confrontations or unlikely nuclear annihilation.

When Treasury revealed Beijing was working on an announcement of their plans for the redeemed funds later in the day after talks with U.S. government officials and asked the agency not to disclose the pending notice until further details, George rejoiced: OK – Beijing gave the Feds a red light, which gives me a green light to talk. Sweet!

Hour Five. George watches/listens/reads business reports of Asian Stock Market closings. His heart plummeted as far as the dollar, nearly throbbing out of his chest as the currency almost imploded. My name is on that dollar, he thought, I can’t let both of us down. With his economics degree and training, he pressed himself to figure-out how to prop-up the currency – and history – during his golden moments when he would speak to his colleagues – and the world – later on the House floor.

Golden. Gold – that’s it! Gold – the legislator raced into his den, switched on his personal computer, and checked the closing price of the precious metal in overnight markets: skyrocketing prices in Australia, Korea, Tokyo, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

Gold – he will convince his congressional colleagues, the nation, and the President to stabilize the dollar by reinstating gold as standard – reverse backing up the currency from bonds – debt – to gold – an asset.

“Thomas...Thomas! Thomas! Thomas!” George shouted before his aide could answer his phone call.

“What’s –”

“I need you to set-up a priority meeting with the President, Treasury Secretary, Federal Reserve Chair, and congressional leaders ASAP. I – we – need to discuss how to reinstate a gold standard.”

“Done. Talk about coming full circle.”

George eclipsed Thomas’ reference. “You mean how ironic to put the dollar back on gold after China cashes-in some of its U.S. debt, when Nixon took the dollar off gold before he visited China and Beijing started buying more U.S. debt?”

“Yeah. Historians and critics will have a field day with this!”

“OK. Alert Elise so she won’t be blindsided when she checks her social media logs. I’m gonna start tweeting #RETURNTOGOLDSTANDARD on the office account with just enough info to tease the markets.”

“OK, Boss. How’s the speech coming?”

George cocked his head and smiled. “Golden...just golden. See you soon.” After tweeting his message, he stood as if he’d emptied precious thoughts locked away for a special moment. He returned to the living room, sank into his oversized armchair, and resumed watching video-only of TV news reports for any effect from his tweet. Although the New York Stock Exchange didn’t open for several hours European, African, and Middle East markets were either in midday or wrapping-up. He snatched-up the remote and un-muted the audio when he saw his name on the running ribbon at the bottom of a news screen:

NEWS ANCHOR: We’re just hearing from U.S. Congressman George Li of San Francisco...announcing a proposal to back the dollar immediately with gold...His tweet #RETURNTOGOLDSTANDARD says he’s requested a meeting with the President, Federal Reserve Chair and Treasury to discuss it ASAP and to stay tuned...Well, looks like the overseas markets saw the tweet, too – the dollar’s climbing back up...In other news, former Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell faces sentencing today following his conviction on federal corruption charges last



September...McConnell, once considered a strong Republican Presidential contender for 2016 –

Choking off the volume, George lowered his body deeper into the chair, his tension melting into the comforting plushness of the cushions. For a split second, he didn't want to move; he wanted acknowledgment, reassurance...human company. When he went to sleep last night, he only looked forward to taking his seat again and heading a committee. No way in Hell did he ever imagine he'd be devising ways to interpret a move by Beijing to save his country – and the global economy – from imploding.

George rose and surveyed his plant-filled jungle of a living room. Amazing how empty it felt now, when it never felt empty before. Compelled to talk to someone, an arousing flash seared through him as he singled-out a gigantic jade floor plant – a gift from Victoria. Despite his insatiable love for flora, he rarely talked to his foliage as most plant-lovers do but moved himself to make an exception given the circumstances.

Bending down on one knee, George cupped a frothy bunch of the jade's bulbous deep green leaves in his hands. "Hello, lady," he cooed, caressing several of the spongy petals. Chuckling, he thought he hadn't talked to Victoria through the plant to avoid scrutiny in a while, when it dawned on him it had also been a while since Victoria called him "darling" over the phone or in person.

Although he knew he was alone he still glanced around to make sure no one was watching. George leaned closer to the lush jade in its iridescent Asian-art design pot. “I know you took a big chance to call me,” he breathed. “And I’m grateful for what you told me. But there’s something you’re not telling me. I could hear it in your voice. Right now, I have to focus on getting results from what you did tell me.” Sucking-in a deep breath, he leaned in closer with reserved intimacy.

“But when we see each other again, when we talk, when we say what we want to say to each other...let’s not destroy our history while we deal with a new one.”

Closing his eyes, George waited several moments until he could fully visualize every detail of Victoria’s perfect, oval, omniscient face. Then, quivering, he pressed his lips on a supple shiny leaf with a salivating, simmering kiss. Since their lips had never, ever touched, he gave himself some time to savor what he always fantasized about experiencing some day...one day.

Hour Six. George retreats to his den again, in front of his personal computer on the corner of his oak executive desk next to a rear corner window. He toyed with sparkly green plant leaves cascading over and around the computer like floral waterfalls as he gazed at the initial hues of sapphire morning light silhouetting the trees outside. He knew he had to be both strategic and substantive with his speech.

He also knew he had to appear as uncompromised as the Pope, given his ethnic heritage. Despite Victoria's hint, the substance had to be original – his thoughts, his ideas – and Victoria's call also let him know whatever he was going to say, Beijing might have already enacted. Somehow, he had to look like a savior and not a traitor.

The constant low gurgle of bubbling water from the pump in the wall-to-wall fish tank on the opposite side of the room tranquilized his running thoughts for several minutes. Watching the dozens of marble-colored fish all fanning towards him made him realize he hadn't fed them yet. Standing over the tank, he picked-up and sprinkled a jar of flakes onto the waters. As he watched the furious food fight between the fish, the answer to the substance for his speech materialized: he's already fed the public the meal they need to survive.

All he had to do was adapt what's already on record – his thesis that aced him an Economics degree from Harvard. As an ideological student, the lawmaker had argued there is a direct correlation between the length of time a U.S. President serves and successful economic cycles – if a President could serve longer than four years in office, his, or her, economic policies would have more time to stabilize the U.S. economy and continue to dominate the global market. George smirked; he based his theory on Franklin Delano Roosevelt's four consecutive terms, allowing his New Deal stimulus to catapult the United States into a global economic superpower.

Now he could really invoke his repetition of how to react to history: there is nothing to fear.

*P-i-i-i-n-n-n-g-g-g!* Shards of window glass bulleted across George's desk as thunderous pounding rocked the townhome entry doors. The simultaneous eruptions paralyzed him, halting between the broken window and the den's closed doors.

"You yellow bastard! Go back where you came from!" Someone screamed outside his rear corner window.

"Mr. Li! Mr. Li! Capitol Police! Open up!" Officers banged on the front townhome door with continuous force while rattling the knobs. "Open up!"

George dived through the den doors into the hallway and flung open the entry. "Someone's on the other side of the house!" he panted. "They just threw something through the window!"

Half the officers ran around the building while two police officers stepped inside. They pushed George back but not before he saw a small crowd of people pacing in front of his house on the sidewalk.

"What's going on?" George asked in sheer innocence.

"The Sergeant-at-Arms wants us to escort you to the Capitol when you're ready," one officer commanded.

Stumped, George asked why. The two officers exchanged astonished glances.

“Protection,” the first officer responded. “We’re just here to make sure you make it to the Capitol,” was all he would say.

A wave of weakness liquefied George’s limbs. “Someone else already threatened me?” he managed to ask. Before either officer answered their colleagues knocked, shouting they had caught a suspect. One officer turned away to engage her colleagues while the other remained with George, stone-faced. “We’re just here for protection,” he repeated.

Anger solidified George’s limbs as his body snapped straight. No one’s gonna scare me, he seethed in defiant silence. I’ve got a mission to execute. When the second officer returned, George invited them to have a seat, watch television, or listen to radio in the living room while he cleaned his desk in the den. He still had a speech to write. Instead of closing both of the double doors he left one open. Staring at the broken window, he remembered what Thomas said earlier about him always seeing an upside to a situation. If he was going to be President, he’d better start getting used to having human protection 24/7/365.

Hour Seven. George completes a draft of his speech; reads it; rehearses; revises; rehearses; revises; rehearses one final time. He downloads a copy onto his personal flash drive; forwards copies to Thomas and Dianne with a terse order in the email subject line: THIS IS FIRM.

Hour Eight. George engages the two Capitol Police officers inside with coffee and conversation, brewing enough for the other officers standing guard outside in their squad car. He peeps through the window at a growing, restless crowd of bystanders when one officer delivered the brew to her colleagues.

“Anybody out there said anything?” He asked her when she returned.

The policewoman hesitated and then admitted, “I can’t repeat it.”

George only laughed, patted the officer on her shoulder, and excused himself to shower and dress. “Help yourself to anything for breakfast in the kitchen,” he offered as he disappeared upstairs.

Hour Nine. George prepares to exit his townhome and head to Capitol Hill. Sandwiching himself between the two officers so he wouldn’t be eaten alive by the protesters, George snatched open the exterior door, hopped onto the stoop, landing behind a third officer, with a fourth one covering the legislator’s rear. Surrounded by police, George skipped down his walkway, ducked into the squad car, and sprung erect in the rear seat. Several people in a sizeable crowd across the street hurled racial insults during the brief moments before he entered the vehicle. As the squad car sped away some protesters chased it, hurling objects instead of taunts.

Thrusting his head back like a stallion, George glimpsed at the officers, smiling. “Thanks.”

Hour Ten. George interviews with a media outlet for a pool; huddles with his staff in his Rayburn House Office building and later with House leaders in the Speaker's office. He opted to answer the deluge of questions about Beijing's intentions in sparse terms rather than announce he planned to address the questions in detail on the House floor. I've got to save the best for last, he reminded himself.

Hour Eleven. Cameras fixate on George as he enters the House Chambers to take his seat. Members swarm him, almost suffocating him with their bodies' thick concentration as bees crushing their leader in a hive. News anchors described the buzz of anxiety and launched a volley of commentary for the billions of global broadcast, cable and internet viewers:

“There's Representative George Washington Li of San Francisco trying to make his way down the aisle. What a name! His bio says his father was so happy when he was born, he named his first son after the country's first president!”

“Everyone's stopping him...asking him about China calling so much of the U.S securities it owns – ”

“And the timing.”

“His timing's been great. I'm looking at his bio again ...says he's a member of the House's U.S. China Working Group...making him one of the Republicans' unofficial diplomats with Beijing...especially since he spent so much time in the country covering China for the British Broadcasting Corporation before coming

back home in early 2008...before his family's business was hit in the financial crisis later that year. Again, talk about perfect timing – and foresight!”

“Yeah, he's credited with switching ownership of his father's restaurant and the rest of his properties to a family limited partnership...and making sure it survived that deadly drought of a credit crunch that dried-up hundreds of small businesses throughout the country in the last quarter of 2008.”

“And of course, he showed other small business owners how to do the same and they made it through, too...That's how he built his local reputation to win his seat a couple of years later in 2010, beating-out a long-time Democrat.”

“More perfect timing for Li – that's also when the Republican blitz to diversify the Party started kicking in...He's says he's an ABC – American Born Chinese!”

“His father is a life-long small business owner...a restaurant he inherited from Li's grandfather...who inherited it from Li's great-grandfather...who was granted citizenship despite a ban against allowing Chinese in the country because he was in a group called Pershing's Chinese.”

“No kidding?”

“That's right...He says right here in his bio...his great-grandfather helped General John Pershing in the Mexican Pancho Villa Expedition in 1916...After the campaign Pershing brought several hundred Chinese who assisted him back to the United States and personally lobbied for their citizenship – which Republican



President Warren G. Harding authorized...Li's on record stating that's why he and his family are loyal Republicans – it's part of their American tradition.”

“Great American story!”

“And now Li's poised to chair the House Foreign Affairs Committee...He certainly made the right connections and jumped over some senior House members to get that slot!”

“Well, like his great-grandfather, he took advantage of the bold, Republican push to put diverse faces in key places.”

“Rising star...Wonder if he'll say anything today on the floor after he's sworn-in?”

Hour Twelve. Overwhelmed but understated, George orchestrated reassurance to his colleagues by the time the Clerk banged the gavel calling the House of Representatives to order on the first legislative day, for its first legislative session, and for his first major legislative test of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Timing was also a critical factor. He knew the scripted drill: opening prayer, pledge of allegiance, certification of national elections, selection and swearing-in of the Speaker, then the oath of office for congress members before getting down to legislative business. George half-listened, half-calculated as the House Chaplain intoned the morning communion:

“Loving God, we give You thanks for giving us another day. We gather on this most significant day when, once again, we celebrate the peaceful transition of democratic government. Though many return from the 113th Congress, this people’s House is a new legislative assembly. May the service of all the Members here gathered give You glory and acquit well the charge entrusted to them by their fellow citizens. Give each Member an abundance of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding that they might know best how to proceed in the work they have been given to do, as well as the courage to act once they have discerned where Your Spirit might lead them. And may all that is done this day and all the days of the 114th Congress be for Your greater honor and glory. Amen.”

The ‘amen’ pinched George’s bowels: what if he was wrong? This is uber speculation on my part, he winced. I’m in Congress, not Journalism – that’s the professional pattern I’m basing my guess on. Even if I’m right, how can I be sure I’m ready? Who will help me? How can I do this? And – why me?

The immediate answer surfaced next through his recitation of the pledge of allegiance – words he’d spoken all his life on autopilot now resonated in the moment as calls to action:

“I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America,  
and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God,  
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

The United States of America. Of all the places in the world, he was in this country. Of all the locations in the United States, he was in the nation's capital. Of all the locations in the nation's capital – the most powerful city in the world – he was in the United States Capitol building, on the House Floor, in a House seat, as a Member of Congress – one of only 535 people in the entire country who could claim that title, out of a population of over 300 million. This isn't about you, George's internal voice guided in his head; just listen – you'll know when to speak up.

Sitting through the next couple of hours of mechanical, parliamentary motions of first day procedures as he had done in 2011 and 2013, George's emotions and attention waded in and out just like his colleagues, their staff and guest family members throughout the chamber and galleries.

His own family had been present on the House floor during George's previous opening day sessions, but he had convinced them to remain in San Francisco this year due to his concerns over his father's health, covering it up by saying his first day in office was just routine now. He never fathomed how wrong he would be about this day, never suspected he would ache for the proximity of his father, the comfort of his mother, for his mentor and big sister Anna to coach him, as he cringed with contemplation over what could be one of the most definitive – or destructive – speeches of his evolving, political, Millennial life.

Rapid patting on his head jarred George and his thoughts out of his head.

“Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!” A congress member switched an energetic, chubby baby from one hip to the other away from the toddler’s target. “I’m so sorry!”

George jumped up, stretched his arms toward the infant and teased, “If you wanted me to hold you just ask!” The little guest leaned away from the congress member toward George, gurgling over its manipulation for attention from someone new.

The legislator bounced off his anxiety through the child as he engaged his colleague and the rest of the family members, striking several poses for pictures while conversing, joining in the festive atmosphere throughout the chamber and galleries until Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Speaker-elect John Boehner stepped onto the podium for the next order of business. The congress member had to peel the babe out of George’s arms; it squealed so loud another family member had to rush the cherub out of the chamber.

Motionless for several startling moments as he watched his newest little friend disappearing down the aisle with tiny arms extending for him, George snapped back to attention, twisted around and focused in front while his colleagues continued to take their seats and his emotions continued to whirl: he wanted that baby as much as that baby wanted him. Or did he simply want a baby? He was well past the age of his great-grandfather, grandfather and even father when they became parents while they built their family legacy. Here he was, about to take a risk and open a new

chapter in a new legacy for his family, but without a son. Another pinch of pain twisted George's gut. He had to figure-out a way to exploit China's treasury call in favor of the United States – and run with it all the way to the White House, not only for his future, but for his future son.

George resumed his deep breathing, managing heavy heartbeats through both Pelosi's and Boehner's speeches. Get ready, his conscience kept warning, your turn is coming soon. His heart throbbed in his throat as Boehner was sworn-in, applauded, then instructed him and his colleagues to all stand and raise their right hands:

“Do you solemnly swear or affirm that you will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that you will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that you take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that you will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which you are about to enter, so help you God?”

After a resounding chorus of “I do!” Boehner certified: “Congratulations! You are now Members of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress!”

Gripping the back of the seat in front of him, George sucked-in a prolonged round of air, and crept toward the dais and the Chair, through Members milling about, shaking hands, hugging, and talking. He dream walked in a direct path to the center

of the raised platform, floated to one spot, and hovered below the Chair, who gazed down at George not with angst but with anticipation, smiling.

With brave humility over the background noise of his colleagues, George asked for five minutes to address the chamber before the next scheduled order of business.

Maybe it was because of how George asked; maybe it was because of how George looked – his softened angular Asian features angelized, his Hollywood-handsome face camera-primed; maybe it was because of what was at stake; no matter, the Chair consented. Relieved, George was about to turn around and head to the central floor podium behind him when he was stopped. He halted in confusion and stared up at the Chair; he was being beckoned up on the dais for unprecedented permission to speak from the same microphone reserved for the Speaker, heads of state, honored guests, and the President of the United States.

Electrified by the act of reverence, George hopped onto the rostrum, shook the Chair's hand and whipped out his iPad while the gavel thumped for everyone's attention.

“The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California for five minutes.”

A nervous, expectant hush permeated the House chamber, with everyone holding their breaths as if waiting for the announcement of a winner in a tight bitter contest. Nearly swooning from the panoramic view, George plastered his hands on the podium for balance. Giving himself several nervous seconds for composure, he

realized he was standing in an elevated spot where even fewer Members of Congress have stood throughout the history of the legislature. He had never seen such a kaleidoscopic view of America as reflected in the audience.

The hallowed enormity of the moment infected him as he absorbed where he was, and why. This is not just your moment, his internal voice affirmed; this is where you belong. Perception is power, and you need to look confident about what you are about to say...what you are about to predict. Drawing himself erect and steady with another long breath, George boomed:

“Mr. Speaker...my colleagues...my fellow Americans...my fellow Americans...my fellow Americans.”

“What are we afraid of?”

“This supreme, solid nation has so many built-in legislative, executive, judicial and economic mechanisms to handle any changes, any transaction.

“That’s right – transaction. China’s treasury call is a transaction between two codependent nations. I know I just said the United States is supreme – it is. It is why China bought U.S. bonds in the first place: investment. And no investor wants to reduce its investment – only maximize it.

“China obviously has plans for the money, and since, like all countries, it needs money, China will probably use the money to make more money. Given the Chinese track record of long-term investing, my hunch is that Beijing is banking on a new

market, a growth market; with one which it has a vested interest not just for its population, but for the world – Green Energy.

“China’s going to need a massive, long-term investment in Green Energy companies to reach their goals in the treaty they signed in November. I’m speculating – and I use the term loosely – based on Beijing’s current posture toward market reforms and my history of tracking the Chinese government’s actions while covering China for the BBC – Beijing wants to use the money for an investment vehicle like a venture capital fund.

“Venture capital funds usually finance startups for seven to ten years. That time frame is within the amount of time China needs to meet its climate change targets in ten to fifteen years. It seems China wants to commit to make sure any company not only produces but continues to produce after the initial funding.

“And let’s not forget another reason why China – and any other foreign investor – bought U.S. bonds in the first place: stability. Beijing only redeemed short-term Treasury bills...investments that mature between 30-365 days. But China is still holding 10-30 year notes and bonds – that’s a sign China still believes in long-term U.S. growth...and existence.

“So, what Beijing may be saying by cashing in only short-term T-bills is, if the United States fails, so does China. The Eagle and the Dragon can co-exist.



“No matter why Beijing wants the money, as I said earlier, the United States is resilient enough to make good on its debt – and keep on growing.

“One of the mechanisms I mentioned earlier – executive authority – is all that’s needed to reinstate the gold standard to maintain the dollar’s global competitiveness. I’m meeting with the President to state that case. No Congressional action would be required, but your support is critical.

“Here’s where Congress does come in – remember, Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution authorizes Congress to pay U.S. debts, so this legislative body can negotiate with Beijing to ‘forgive us our debts’ to a certain extent – and, of course, as a member of the House’s Working China Group, I would be honored to broker any such negotiations.

“Again, whatever reason China called the T-bills, it’s going to take time to adjust, time to manifest results, like FDR’s New Deal Projects, and the Truman Plan to rebuild Europe after World War Two. Yes, I know both those investments were war-related, but this is not war, this is not an attack, it is a redemption for the United States to pay what it owes as part of an investment – our investment.

“This is not an end. Only short-sightedness views this as an end, only fear considers this an implosion – we’re too strong for that – only fear can prevent us from continuity. I ask again, what are we afraid of?

“My colleagues, the only thing we really have to fear, is fear itself. God bless us – and may God continue to bless America!”

Thunderous applause erupted, reverberating from both sides of the aisle, the galleries, the dais around the podium and over the unified chorus of “USA! USA! USA!”, the news anchors resumed their commentary:

“And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why his congressional colleagues... constituents...and community all call him ‘The Mediator’!”

Monitoring the broadcast proceedings on the CSPAN network in the nearby Republican National Committee headquarters, a certain official took notice as if discovering George for the first time, instructing her colleagues they should develop his untapped potential as part of their diversity blitz to regain the White House.

Congress members extended their rolling rounds of applause and cheers as George returned to stand next to his aisle. House Members from both sides of the partisan walkway instantly pressed around him, furiously shaking his hands; wildly slapping his shoulders; crazily embracing him as if he’d just scored a touchdown – except one, who stood detached and unconvinced, looking at George as much of a threat as China.

The San Franciscan lawmaker felt buoyed by the motions, feeling he was on the deck of a ship instead of the House floor and he reveled like a captain who just steered his vessel one strategic move away from sinking. Deafened by the continuous roar of applause, George didn't hear his persistent cellphone alerts.

As the adulation persisted a Page managed to squeeze through the crush of congress members, shouting for George's attention and pushed a note into the legislator's outstretched hand. The message was from his Media Secretary, Dianne:  
CHINESE CONSULATE GENERAL EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW @ 6 PM ON  
GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT – ENTIRE SHOW ON BIG CHINA  
ANNOUNCEMENT – GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS NETWORK WILL  
BROADCAST LIVE.

George plastered the note to his heart with a silent prayer while continuing to force himself to smile and nod like a bobble head doll as he acknowledged his colleagues. “The House will come to order!” the Chair banged the gavel until everyone, including George, sat down, absorbing the constant pounding from the podium as simultaneous pounding of his heart.

Up to now, he was gambling on his interpretation of Victoria's phone call, assuming she wanted him to set the tone not for the securities redemption but also pave the way for his colleagues' acceptance in his political ambitions. As the House proceeded with the next order of business, George just stared hard at his message: if the interview did not confirm anything he said, he was finished. Dead. History.

.....  
Several Capitol Police officers stood sentry in the halls outside George's main office entrance. Some protesters had managed to break through earlier in reaction to Wall Street rocking back and forth throughout the day, opening low; skyrocketing after George's speech; then tapering off at the closing bell with moderate gains, mostly in energy-related stocks.

Inside his personal interior office he waited with a knotted stomach to watch the Chinese announcement, huddled with his staff: Thomas and Dianne; Office Manager Sylvia Ho; Social Media and News Coordinator Elise Ye; Administrative Assistants Nancy Yue, Victor Lee and several revolving caseworkers. They all became transfixed to the TV monitor at the audio of the show's opening introduction over video of two anchors; a Chinese official and a Black woman holding posters seated on the other side of the anchor desk:

ANNOUNCER: This is GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT!

FIRST ANCHOR: We have a very special, live edition tonight for Tuesday, January Sixth – a day of financial history!

SECOND ANCHOR: That's because China makes an unprecedented call to redeem nearly a billion dollars in U.S. treasury bills – a move considered more a political test of the U.S. economy as well as U.S. – Sino relations.

FIRST ANCHOR: But, in another historic first...we have an exclusive interview with the Chinese Consul General right here in our studio to announce how Beijing plans to use the money for the treasuries they want to cash in.

SECOND ANCHOR: And Republican Congressman Reece Williams also joins us for a counter response to China's explanation.

FIRST ANCHOR: Doesn't matter what it is – he's already, or should we say, ready – against it.

Shocked and confused at the announcement of the opposing guest, George snatched the receiver of his desk phone and pounded its keys. “Who you calling?” Dianne asked in a shaky voice.

“The GBNN producer I know. Since this is live they can patch me in over the phone to counter whatever Reece says,” George defended. He dismissed Dianne’s withering look. “I promise I won’t swear on the air,” he teased. After confirming his spot on the show, George held the phone line and resumed the hypnotic watch of the program with his staff:

SECOND ANCHOR: All that and more, on this special, live edition of GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT. Good evening everyone, and welcome.

And Consul General Wang, welcome. What is the announcement from Beijing you’re making exclusively on GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT?

CONSUL GENERAL: Good evening. Thank you very much for allowing me this air time.

I am very pleased to say Beijing is using money from redeemed United States treasury bills to set-up a venture capital fund to invest in United States businesses. The venture capital fund will focus on financing small businesses and new businesses that produce clean energy.

These businesses will help both China and the United States reach their climate change treaty goals...and create millions of jobs in both countries.

SECOND ANCHOR: Why redeem U.S. treasuries instead of using existing Chinese funds?

CONSUL GENERAL: Partnership. China considers this a partnership. Since the United States and China produce the most greenhouse gas pollution in the world, this is a way to ensure both countries will work together to reduce global pollution, to meet the goals of the climate change treaty.

As partners, China uses its investments in the United States to take to another level...as soon as possible...as efficiently as possible. This way, capital can flow quickly and without interruption to companies that will, as you say, start clearing the air.

China is just switching the type of investment – short term T-bills – to long-term venture capital.

FIRST ANCHOR: Why doesn't China just buy green companies – if cleaner air and more jobs are your only goals, you certainly have the money to do that without any market disruption, like with Smithfield Foods?

The Consul General jerked, turned slightly around in his seat, directing his response squarely at the journalist.

CONSUL GENERAL: That is not partnership. China wants to invest. The United States Government has a program that will allow China to invest in new clean energy small businesses for several years.

China agreed to a 15-year goal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in the climate change treaty...the United States government program...a small business program...allows a United States-China type partnership to give small businesses enough time to help both countries reach treaty targets...allowing our citizens to, as you say, breathe easier.

And a Chinese company bought Smithfield Foods, not the Chinese government.

FIRST ANCHOR: Yes, and I don't mean to as we say mix apples with oranges, but the Chinese company Shuangui bought Smithfield because there were problems with the Chinese company's tainted meat production...and reportedly tried to avoid government intervention by Beijing.

So, is Beijing following Shuangui's lead because it can't regulate its own alternative fuel companies?

Still facing the journalist, Counsel General Wang responded in a controlled but tense tone:

CONSUL GENERAL: As I said...a Chinese company bought the U.S. company, but not as you said, because of a problem with how it processes pork...it could not process enough pork for our growing Chinese market...China is the largest pork consumer market in the world.



Shuangui invested in what the United States proudly calls ‘yankee ingenuity’ to feed the Chinese people. Beijing is investing in ‘yankee ingenuity’ to prevent its people...and the world...from choking on polluted air.

FIRST ANCHOR: Well, what type of companies are you talking about?

CONSUL GENERAL: China will invest in small businesses that find ways to develop clean fuel and energy from ethanol...biodiesel...natural gas...butanol...batteries...hydrogen...methane...vegetable and peanut oil...propane. We want to cover all possibilities for this partnership.

SECOND ANCHOR: This is a good time to introduce our Small Business Administration guest who will explain just how small businesses in the clean energy sector can benefit from this historic venture capital funding...Sharon Jackson, welcome to GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT.

FIRST ANCHOR: Yes, please explain. What about ownership? Won’t China own hundreds of U.S. small businesses no matter what the reason?

Dressed in a moderate business suit with minimal jewelry and make-up, the 30-something-year-old Black female sprung into a lively response, using numeric hand gestures like an animated schoolteacher in front of a blackboard to illustrate her conversation, speaking with the pace of a horse racetrack announcer:

SHARON JACKSON: No-o-o-o! Thanks for the chance to explain! This is a simplified version of how it works: First, China cashes-in its securities and uses the monies to form a venture capital fund!

Second, China selects investment fund companies that will apply to the Small Business Administration for licenses to operate as what are called SBIC's – Small Business Investment Companies! And third, once an SBIC is cleared by the SBA, the SBIC loans money from China's venture capital fund to new companies specializing in alternative energy. Still with me?

SECOND & FIRST ANCHOR: Uh huh.

SHARON JACKSON: Now, the average SBIC loan is 7 years and can only be extended with SBA approval for up to three years – a maximum ten-year-loan!

FIRST ANCHOR: Well, it sounds like almost anybody can get an SBIC loan! Instead of the California gold rush now it seems like a Chinese loan rush!

Almost jumping from his seat, Consul General Wang slammed both hands on the anchor desk and spoke in a controlled but angry tone:

CONSUL GENERAL: Excuse me, but your comparison to Chinese miners who migrated to California in the 1880's to look for gold is offensive.

That was individual and for personal opportunity. This is between two governments and is an economic partnership.

FIRST ANCHOR: No pun intended. Ms. Jackson, please continue.

SHARON JACKSON: As Consul General Wang said China is partnering with the United States to reach the climate change treaty target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions! There is a two-part SBA program to make sure that venture capital flows to what we consider “high growth” start-up companies. Here’s how it works!

The SBA official held-up her street vendor –sized posters towards the camera, blocking her entire upper body as she described the government plans in a rousing cheerleader fashion, and an anchor intervened before she finished.

SECOND ANCHOR: I just want to be clear on the U.S. government’s role – it’s like a conduit for financing?

SHARON JACKSON: Exactly! The SBA’s mission is to make sure U.S. small business gets a fair chance to thrive and survive!

SECOND ANCHOR: How can U.S. businesses help China reach its climate change treaty goals if they’re in the United States?

SHARON JACKSON: Small Business Investment Company rules allow businesses to operate with less than forty-nine percent of their employees outside of the United States! Good way to track their progress in both economies! If something is working in the United States but not in China we can figure-out why and make adjustments!

SECOND ANCHOR: Sharon Jackson of the Small Business Administration, thanks for joining us, and special thanks to you, Consul General Wang, for joining us and giving us an historic announcement on an historic day...and, as we've seen, quite a sensitive announcement, too. Next, we'll hear from two members of Congress with opposing views after a look at today's stock market activity around the world.

As the musical bridge for the background to the visuals of the day's stock market, commodities and precious metals blared, George ordered his breath-holding staff members with the phone glued to one ear: "I just got my cue to stand by. Elise, please make sure we're recording this. Thomas, I'll need whatever I say hammered in whatever speeches I give from this point on – No! No! No!" he interrupted himself, switching back to someone on the other end of the phone at GBN. "It's pronounced like L-E-E...yes, yes, y-e-e-e-s-s-s...it is George. Washington. Li...As in the first president of the United Sta –"

FIRST ANCHOR: Welcome back to GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT. We now have two members of Congress ready to square off on China's treasuries call. Joining us from Capitol Hill is Representative Reece Trelane Williams of Virginia, who sits on the House Armed Services Committee, and on the phone is Representative George Washington Li of California, who actually previewed China's announcement earlier today on the House floor.

He's a member of the House's diplomatic U.S.-China Working Group...and Representative Williams is a member of the defensive China Caucus, a voting bloc for U.S. policy on China.

A split screen of George's official congressional photo while a live shot of Reece Williams filled the other half of the monitor: tall, slightly slender built with a hawkish, military posture dressed in a dark business suit; blonde hair, fiery green eyes, square face and jaw, constant attack-mode facial expression which matched his combative tone.

FIRST ANCHOR: Congressman Williams, you first, since we've already heard from Beijing, the Small Business Administration, and Representative Li earlier today.

REECE: Thanks for having me, to stand-up to this communist financial coup by China –

GEORGE: The United States government is still in charge –

FIRST ANCHOR: Gentlemen! Gentlemen! I see we need to set some ground rules so both of you can talk. Representative Williams, you first, with at least one point, then Representative Li counters. If Mr. Li wants to make a point after he counters, he can do so, and then Mr. Williams responds. Agree?

REECE: OK.

GEORGE: Sorry to interrupt. Please, go ahead, Reece.

REECE: I don't need your permission to speak! As I was saying before the cowardly, yellow interruption –

SECOND ANCHOR: Congressman Williams! We're also going to have to ask you to refrain from any xenophobic, racist comments and innuendo!

FIRST ANCHOR: That's right! We've got enough tensions in the streets! We don't need it here in the studio! We know this is unprecedented, but let's keep it civil and respectful!

REECE: I will respect America and defend her – Beijing's bonds call is not partnership – it's an attack! It's part of the strategy to destroy America, outlined in that 1999 book co-authored by two Chinese colonels – Unrestricted Warfare – it's a Sino-blueprint for waging consistent, non-military combat by infiltrating U.S. economic and security systems...it's China's mindset for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead of military offenses and guerilla warfare as we know it, Beijing's bonds call is part of cyber and financial warfare. My colleague did not mention that!

So, this is nothing but a backdoor approach to own U.S. companies since Obama signed that climate change treaty without congressional approval. The President of the United States gave China an opening to exploit under the guise of eliminating greenhouse gas emissions while infiltrating American businesses!

The Consul General claims China needs ‘yankee ingenuity’ to find ways to stop its people from choking after they’ve cashed-in their bonds and strangle the United States! It’s a coup, plain and simple. Let’s call it what it is. Someone’s got to stand-up and protect America! Treasury briefed Congress and said China only applied to redeem short-term Treasury bills. Only? What’s to stop them from calling-in the rest of what they own? This is just the beginning, a warning! They’re acting like they’ve got their finger on a nuclear-financial button, just waiting to push it!

SECOND ANCHOR: Well...Congressman Li?

GEORGE: First, let me thank you for allowing me to participate at the last minute in what I hope will be a positive, on-going discussion with you, my congressional colleague and the American people, who are not, I repeat, not under attack. As I said earlier today on the House floor, we have nothing to fear but fear itself if we believe we’re under attack.

China has as much at stake to lose if these businesses don’t succeed and produce. China is the world’s second largest economy, but its lifeline is pumped by U.S. exports – which was \$124 billion in 2014, I might add – these new and existing clean energy companies just add more flow to that vital artery.

REECE: If China – and Congressman Li – are so convinced these alternative energy companies are such a sure thing, that America will just embrace them, why this backdoor approach?

The congressman can't deny that the source of venture capital for SBIC's is not only direct ownership but also circumvents review by the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States –

GEORGE: Well, there you go. You can't accuse President Obama of encouraging a Chinese coup, as you describe their investment, when he rejected a Chinese company's attempt to buy an Oregon wind farm company three years ago.

REECE: Yes, Obama did block Ralls Corporation –

GEORGE: On the recommendation of CFIUS –

REECE: Right, on the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States – from building several wind farms near a Naval Weapons System training facility in Oregon.

GEORGE: And...because?

REECE: Because China could've used the sites for spying. But that only made the Chinese smarter; made them find a way around the legal recommendation for a purchase approval by CFIUS and the President.

Instead of outsourcing jobs to China, China's coming to the source for jobs through control and profit. The SBA official failed to mention China profits handsomely when they exit these SBIC's. The small businesses usually merge with similar businesses or they're acquired. China gets either stock or cash for its venture capital investment –



GEORGE: So do the limited partners, the U.S. equity firms.

REECE: But guess who gets most of the money? The Consul General didn't go that far with what Beijing would do with their profits. You know... my colleague seems to know before the White House what Beijing plans to do –

GEORGE: It's called partnership, as Consul General Wang said –

REECE: But if this was cashing-in stock instead of bonds, it would be called 'insider trading.' I think an ethics probe is in order to determine just how my colleague knew exactly what Beijing planned but did not disclose –

FIRST ANCHOR: Gentlemen, we'll have to leave it there, unfortunately we're running out of time. Thank you, both, and I'm sure we'll talk with you both again as the effects of this historic event play out.

REECE: Thanks again for allowing me to speak against this financial coup!

GEORGE: Good night...and may God continue to bless America!

FIRST ANCHOR: And that's it for this special, live fireworks edition of GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT. We'll see you back here tomorrow with more details on this unprecedented treasuries call, and how it's going to affect the global economy. Good night!

SECOND ANCHOR: Good night, everyone!

Rattled by Reece's ethics threat, George flung the entire phoneset across the room during the closing notes of the GLOBAL BUSINESS NEWS REPORT musical theme, petrifying everyone except Thomas.

"What's the matter with you, Boss? You know Reece tried to block you from getting your committee chair, so he's trying to get you out of that chair any way he can," his aide reasoned. "Why're you letting him get to you?"

Calmed by Thomas' constant logic, George paused and glanced around like a sheepish child at everyone's panicked expressions. Bowing his head he muttered, "I'm sorry. I guess I forgot my own advice – no fear."

"Really," Dianne chirped. "Whaddaya have to fear?"

George forced a guilty smile, thinking: if you only knew. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all...nothing."

Without warning, one of the Capitol Police officers guarding the hallway office entrance materialized in the interior doorway. "Mr. Li, a young man out here d'mands t'talk w' ya. Says he's a college student an' got a' appointment. He's outside in th' cor'idor."

Both administrative assistants recoiled, denying scheduling any meetings on opening session day. Silencing them with a thrust of his hand, George wondered why the officer inquired about this particular visitor when a menacing stream of people had preyed outside his office door all day long. "What's his name?"

The officer smirked. “Says its Martin Luther Kennedy.”

George cocked his head: “Whaddya think? Did you pat him down?”

“No, sir, but ‘can frisk him if y’ wan’ me to. He’s sharp an’ wearin’ a business suit...but y’ never know.”

“If you escort him in, can you stand guard in this office while we talk?”

“Sure.”

“Please, check his ID, do a weapons check, then show him in.” Turning to his reluctant staff, George was academic: “If my gut is correct, we both have historical names, this is an historical day, so I’d like to at least hear him out – I just have a hunch he’s got something significant to say.” He waved everyone out of his office as the officer returned and paused in the doorway. George executed his own quick search on his computer; after several minutes, he nodded.

“Mr. Kennedy, y’ c’n come in now.”

George stifled a surprised gasp at the stunning appearance of the young Black man when the police officer stepped to the side after announcing him. The student’s skeletal, nearly seven-foot-tall, basketball player-type frame was impeccably draped in a dark, Wall Street-like business suit, complimenting his caramel brown skin. His slender face was candy-smooth, and his eager, be-speckled, slanted eyes, sharp nose, high cheekbones and full, wide lips were all deep-set in an eagle-shaped head crowned with close-cropped, wavy black hair.

With a coat and scarf draped over one arm and a briefcase dangling from the other, he stood at attention, staring in triumph at the still-seated representative behind his desk.

“Forgive me,” George extended his hand. “But I know you’ve had people tell you that you look more like Malcolm X than Martin Luther King.”

Stepping forward the student grasped George’s greeting, smiling as if he’d guessed a prediction and joked: “Actually, most people say I do favor my other namesake – John F. Kennedy.”

“OK...You said you have an appointment?”

Smiling full of prediction again, the student continued shaking George’s hand. “Yes sir – I have an appointment with destiny. I want to change the Constitution of the United States.”

George snatched his arm away and grabbed the ends of his desk. Now he bared upon the young man with penetrating eyes and challenged him. “How?”

“I’ve read your dissertation,” Martin appeased. “And I’m here to discuss a plan to persuade the people of the United States to vote for a constitutional convention.”

“Why?”

“Whatever changes happen, it’s gonna take continuity, and like you said on the House floor this morning, it’s gonna take time. I believe we students can start the process now to give the next President time to stabilize the United States.”

An electric idea sparked between the two political conduits. “Please,” George cautioned. “Sit down and explain.”

Taking a seat in front of the congressman, Martin flipped open his briefcase and pulled-out a handful of papers, placing them in his lap. Pausing with a quizzical expression, he smiled with an unplanned question: “Excuse me, Representative Li, but don’t you want to know who I am?”

“You mean what you are?”

“Sir?”

“If there’s more to you than your title of Howard University Student Association President...current Junior...Political Science major...Economics minor...Andrew Rankin Chapel usher...recent summer law clerk at Gregory & Gregory...Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity member...and Washington D.C. native who is first in your family to attend college, then yes, please tell me more.”

It was George’s turn to pause and delight in Martin’s speechless expression. “I’m on Linked-In, too. The internet is great – tons of information in microseconds – assuming it’s all true.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Not every pre-law student gets to clerk at Gregory & Gregory before they graduate,” George summed up. “So, you must have very, very convincing powers of persuasion.”

“And organization,” Martin added, recovering from his brief unbalance. “What I’m proposing requires extensive organization – ”

“And validation.”

“Excuse me?”

“Whatever you’re proposing requires validation,” George projected. “Or you wouldn’t be here. So, let’s start all over. How can I help you?”

Martin seemed to suppress indignation while the police officer standing guard near the door coughed, covering slight laughter. The stumped student took several moments to compose himself; he underestimated the representative’s reaction.

“I’m here to propose a national student campaign to change the Constitution based on your thesis,” Martin said. “Switch the terms of office between Senators and the President. All Senators would serve four years and the President would serve six years – no change to the presidential term limits and no change to the unlimited terms for senators.”

“I like what I hear so far.”

“Since there is no way the Senate would propose cutting their time in office, that means the other option – a constitutional convention – is the way to go. That’s thirty-four states calling for the convention – two-thirds of state legislatures.”

“And you propose to convince state legislators by doing what?”

“Organizing student-led chapters in each state on Martin Luther King Day later this month to launch the campaign. An all-out lobbying, grass roots strategy.”

“You’ve got Howard students from each state willing to do what?”

“Willing to give-up their student break and turn their time into service for an alternative spring break. We’ve got students willing to use their vacation to lobby the state legislature in their home state to call a constitutional convention.”

“And you finance this how?”

“Crowdfunding. Once the national campaign is announced and organized, we launch accounts online to raise funds.”

“Since you know I can’t lobby anyone, I’m flattered you’re putting my thesis to the test. I just don’t know why you’re here.”

“I’m here to show you our organization plans. And to ask if you would speak at our rally on campus on MLK Day.”

“Validation.”

“Yes, sir. Validation.”

George battled euphoric waves of giddiness as he stared down Martin, waiting for an expected answer. My God, the legislator thought, twice in one day – opportunities to run for President and to serve the first extended term as President. But the difference between the sources of his political fortune was trust: he knew Victoria, not Martin Luther Kennedy. This was not the time to risk association with what could be a timely pop, not permanent movement; he needed all the credibility he had to fight the financial crisis – and win.

“Let me take a look at those papers,” George decided to at least acknowledge what the student wrote. “Do you have a folder or binder to put ‘em in?”

Pulling an envelope out of his briefcase, Martin gushed with a sense of mission accomplished. He simmered with satisfaction as he watched the congressman flip through the pages, continuous expressions of impressed reactions popping-up in his face. The student sat in quiet, presumed victory.

“No.” George handed the papers back to Martin.

“Why?”

“As you said, I did emphasize on the House floor it’s going to take time to make changes work. Right now, I need to make the best use of my time – and that’s chairing the committee and brokering the U.S. – China relationship, not promoting my own thesis,” George lied.



Bolts of silence sparked between the two opportunists. Finally, the student schemed: “And I also said I had an appointment with destiny. What my internet profile doesn’t show is my character – my focus on service, not self. That part of me isn’t based on my name, but on my grandmother – who is part Chinese – always said I reminded me of her. She said even as a child, I always made the best use of my time. So, thanks for granting me some of your time.”

“Listen,” George continued to camouflage his exuberance. “I know you have classes in the morning, yet you waited all day and worked your way in here to see me, and I’m really glad you did. I can’t endorse what you’re doing, but I can keep up with it. Give my staff your contact info on your way out, and put my office email on your listserv.”

Martin clasped George’s hand with another bolt of political deception. “Thanks! Thanks! Thanks, Mr. Li – can I get a selfie?”

“Not now, perhaps later,” George deflected, sidestepping the student’s slick attempt at evidence to imply validation. “Good luck. Officer, would you see this gentleman out, please, and come back in to let me know what the rest of your detail is as far as guard duty.”

George planned to ask for a ride home instead of hailing a cab so late on this volatile night. Stepping between the two men, the officer nodded toward the congressman and motioned Martin toward the exit. Returning after several minutes, the Capital Police officer paused as if at attention with a commander in front of the congressman who smiled, awkward at his stance.

“You don’t have to be so formal with me,” George blushed. “Please...just have a seat.”

“Not while on duty, sir. But thanks,” he answered in a deadpan Detective Joe Friday-type monotone.

“No, thank you for clearing that young man. You were right about him. I could hear it in your voice when you described him.”

A glimmer of satisfaction flickered in the officer’s fixed eyes. “That’s from what you kids – ‘xcuse me, sir – young people – call ‘old school’ thinkin’ and ‘xperience.”

“Kids? I love it. Anyway, it certainly came in handy. Well, I know you’re busy with other things to do here at the Capitol, and I don’t want to hold you too long, but can I – ”

“We got plenty a’ time, sir.”

Confused, George singled-out and with peculiar emphasis, repeated: “Excuse me, but ‘we’?”

“Yes, sir. M’ guard duty ain’t just t’ y’ office. ‘Been assigned t’ ya. Head of your 24-hour protection team.”

“Bodyguard?”

“Yes. Sir.”

In near-incapacitating silence, George now stared at the still erect-standing officer in an entirely different light: a 60-ish white male, about his height, but with stocky and muscular build, bald head with silver-grey eyebrows arched over intense, small, blue eyes set in an equally intense, pit bull-shaped face.

Clearing his throat several times before speaking, George finally managed to ask, “Well...what’s your name?”

“Taylor.”

“I see that on your badge. I mean your first name – or whatever you want me to call you, since we are going to be living together for a while.”

“Nathan. But ev’ryone calls me ‘Snipe’.”

Given the circumstances, George’s near-incapacitating fear choked him again until he swallowed enough to repeat without stuttering. “Snipe?”

“It’s what used t’ do in th’ military, sir. Served in th’ Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan. Was in th’ military thirty years. Joined right outta high school. Best time o’ m’ life. Met a lotta people. Travelled a lotta places. Don’ have no problems ‘bout my service, what ‘did. Just consider it service, ‘xperience and preparation.”

“Preparation?”

“For a’assignment like this. Was assigned to head this detail ‘cause of m’ ‘xper’ence an’ spec’l skill.”

Taking in deep, slow and measured breaths, George attempted to disguise his near-paralysis over Snipe’s implication. But the officer’s very presence throughout the day seared an unexpected reality in the legislator’s consciousness again: he was now a constant target. This was too much, too soon.

Determined to at least act brave, George tried again to make light of the moment. “Well...that certainly accounts for why you can size people up so well.”

Snipe’s stiffness softened a bit from George’s self-serving compliment, but the guard maintained his formality and did not respond.

“I didn’t expect any guests,” the lawmaker struggled. “So I didn’t have time to shop for groceries. Meantime...I sure hope you like Chinese food.”

Shifting his weight, Snipe snorted, half-embarrassed. “Actually, ‘hate it. Ate so much of it growin’ up.”

“So do I,” George joked through the breakthrough of tension. “And so did I. Do you cook?”

“Nope,” Snipe snorted again, more embarrassed.

“I guess your wife – or girlfriend – takes care of the meals.”

“Nope. Nope. Nobody but m’self. Eat out a lot.”

“My man! Don’t stand there and tell me a good-lookin’ stud like you is single! Not in this town!”

A thin, pinkish veneer crept over the officer’s pale, dry complexion. Bowing his head and shifting like an awkward teen, he confessed: “Ain’t too lucky with women. Never have been. ‘Sides, women in this town only like ‘suits’. So, just stay to ‘self a lot.”

Realizing he was on a roll, George persisted with his impromptu interview of his unexpected roommate. “But you do spend time in the gym. You weren’t born with those muscles! You’ll be happy to know I got a gym in my basement. So, you don’t have to miss a beat.”

Shifting his stance again, Snipe started to rock side-to-side with suppressed eagerness. “Good...good...got a treadmill?”

“Of course! The kind that lets you select your own scenery on its screen. Or, you can watch whatever you want on the wall mounted TV while you run. You are a runner, right?”

Nodding, Snipe continued rocking with a little less defensiveness.

“And you can watch whatever you want – especially those extreme sports, hunting, fishing, adventure shows and channels,” George continued prying, “that I bet you like to watch.”

Surprised but delighted, Snipe nodded again, a smile inching across his face.

“What’s your favorite meal?”

“From Iowa...out west. So, solid meat and potatoes man,” Snipe gushed. “Could sure use a steak right now. ‘Been on duty over twelve hours. Hungry as a racehorse!”

“Give me an hour or so with my staff, and let me make some quick calls. Then, we’ll head...home. I’ll bake you potatoes that’ll make you homesick, and I’ll grill you a steak, and smother it in onions, and make it so tender it’ll curl your toes and make you crave a cigarette afterwards!”

“Don’ smoke, but any seconds can take th’ place of a cigarette!” Snipe drooled.

“Well, then, I can also whip up whatever type of dessert you want. And don’t worry – both my grandfather and my father – two ‘old school’ men as you call them – taught me to cook. You’ll see!”

Now salivating and slapping his hands, Snipe bounced like a starving teenager. “Sounds good! Sounds good! Lemme talk to m’ team. Couple o’ officers’ll be posted outside in their squad car when ‘inside with you. They’re hungry, too!”

“No problem. I can fix enough for everybody, and you can take them each a plate.” George lifted himself with relief, extending his hand to dig a little deeper. “While I fix dinner, you’ve got to tell me some of your war stories. I just know your family is really proud.”

Snipe's animation vanished. Standing in solemn silence again with his hands dangling at his sides, in an even more detached voice he uttered what he had obviously repeated numerous times before meeting George: "Don' have no family. 'Been a orphan all m' life...Th' military was m' family...Lost a lot o' brothers 'n sisters...All o' 'em was m' brothers 'n sisters...all o' 'em."

Sensing an opportunity to bond further, George locked eyes with Snipe, still offering his hand. "And I never had a big brother...especially one who fought in three wars...Welcome home."

The guard gripped the legislator's hand in overwhelming, emotional gratitude, shaking with the vigorousness of agreeing to an understood pact.

"We're gonna get along just fine," George predicted through a calm façade.

Later, as the legislator piled into the squad car with Snipe and his fellow officers, his intuition kicked-in: he felt compelled to take a back route to his townhouse instead of the usual straight way east, down Independence Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue.

He covered his gut feeling with logic: with Independence blocked at both ends to prevent any regular vehicle traffic past the Capitol, any lingering hostile crowds would suspect their car and possibly attack.

Since an assault was credible, it was late at night and citizens were still tense, the officers agreed and cleared the checkpoint to turn right after the Rayburn, Longworth and Cannon House Office buildings onto a side road, First Street SE, past the RNC.

As the squad car approached the Republican National Committee headquarters, a Metro police officer flagged them down, stopping them a little way past the Capitol South subway station entrance across from the building. While the two Capitol Police officers upfront exited the vehicle, Snipe remained seated next to George in the rear, giving him full view of the headquarters, allowing him to lapse into a nostalgic moment.

He transported back to that prophetic day just four years ago in January, when George and his other 2010 Republican classmates first visited the RNC during freshmen orientation. He remembered how struck he was at the initial sight: it looked like a former, multi-unit apartment building to him instead of an office complex. He couldn't figure-out why that mattered to him, but he filed his feelings under a mental To Be Determined folder in case it meant something later on during his time in office, when a cab slowed down curbside in front of the walkway.



An unidentified man burst through some double doors, zipped down the pavement, popped open the cab door and hopped inside before it could completely stop. When the driver accelerated, George strained to glimpse the passenger, who didn't look in his direction: Reece had his phone plastered to his ear while making forceful, angry gestures as the taxi whizzed by.

Amazed and intrigued, George whipped his head around toward Snipe. "Cab didn't even make a pit stop."

Thinking of Reece's ethics probe threat, George could only seethe, his emotions simmering like a pot about to boil: I don't know what you were doing there, but it doesn't matter. Game on, mister...game on, mister...game on.

Finally the two escort officers returned to their squad car. "They just needed some back-up for an arrest," one explained. "Seems we came by at the right time."

George breathed in defiance, agreeing: "Correct. It's right on time. Everything about this day has been perfect timing," as they resumed their trip to his Capitol Hill townhome.

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Wired from the previous day's tumultuous events, George's psyche rippled with currents of anxiety and tension throughout the night, blocking adequate sleep. Dreams of his morning presentation at the White House before the President, Federal Reserve Chair, Treasury Secretary and congressional Joint Economic Committee members kept recurring, always ending with everyone gaping at him – he couldn't figure out if it was acceptance or rejection – before always waking up just as the Speaker called the House in session later that afternoon. Weaving in and out of consciousness, his stressful sleep deprivation induced strains of doubt, with an unknown, taunting voice echoing in his mind: maybe you should postpone this meeting...maybe you're not ready...not ready...not ready...not ready...

Archiving toward his cell, George snatched-up the phone and flipped-off a musical alarm ringtone. Great timing, he yawned, rolling onto the floor, skipping across the hall, tapping on Snipe's half open bedroom door. Wow, he's on it – already up, the legislator reacted, impressed at the sight of his bodyguard's made-up bed. Military!

George switched into athletic wear and bounded downstairs, through the hallway, living room and kitchen, calling-out as he hit the basement steps. "Hey, buddy! Morning! Did you actually sleep upstairs or down here in the –"

Standing in shock, George paused on the bottom of the staircase, unprepared for the first morning sight of his security roommate, glistening with sweat, pounding at hyper speed on the treadmill, clothed in a sleeveless, military muscle t-shirt and sweat shorts, pumping his Herculean-muscled arms, thighs, right leg and prosthetic left leg.

“Man!” Sniped huffed. “Y’ were right! This is awesome! Don’ hav’ t’ worry ‘bout nobody else waitin’ for ya t’ hurry y’ up t’ finish y’ workout! Jus’ wanted t’ get done b’fore y’got up so wouldn’t cut into y’ routine!”

Stupefied and still, George just continued staring at Snipe from the steps, unsure what to say or do.

“Been watchin’ th’ news,” Snipe puffed. “Always watch b’fore go out workin’, so will know what’s going’ on...all right! Done!” Jumping on the floor, the guard slipped-off a holstered gun dangling from a handlebar, scooped up a towel, rubbed his face, and stepped toward George. “Thanks, man! What time d’ we leave?”

“A-a-around eight...White House meeting is at nine...then House session at noon.” George directed his eyes to focus on Snipe’s face and not on the lower part of the guard’s body.

“OK, lemme tell crew, so ‘have time t’ go ‘n get somethin’ t’ eat first.”

“Don’t worry,” George deferred. “I’ll fix breakfast...and coffee.”

“Good! Good! Lemme tell crew, shower, get dressed, ‘n meet ya in th’ kitchen!”

Snipe bounced without any extra effort past an astonished George, who slipped and lost his balance.

“Oops! Sorry, man!” the guard apologized, grabbing his charge to prevent him from falling. “You OK?”

“Sure...sure...sure...you go on,” George uttered with softness, patting Snipe on his shoulder. As Snipe bounded up the stairs and disappeared, George gripped the handrail and stared into empty space, feeling like he was the one with a disability – not Snipe.