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Elaine Chao: 'Sure-footed' for new job

By CHEN WEIHUA
and LARRY LEE in Washington

Elaine Chao, the nominee for US secretary of transportation, feels she is fully prepared for the challenging job.

While the deteriorating infrastructure and transportation system has become a source of constant complaint in the US, Chao said she is "very sure-footed" for the job.

"There is a great deal to be done. And I am very confident that we will be able to do it," she told China Daily on Thursday, just a day before Donald Trump's inauguration as the 45th US president.

Chao said the top priority of the Department of Transportation is safety. The second is to address the deteriorating infrastructure, which impedes the US' competitiveness. The third is to focus on the future and deal with the emerging technologies that are changing the way Americans work and travel.

She would not say whether or not there were plans for high-speed rails or other major projects and where the funding will come from, saying the White House and Cabinet will discuss these matters once they are in place.

Having served eight years as Labor secretary under President George W. Bush, Chao is no stranger to the Department of Transportation. She was the deputy transportation secretary under President George H. W. Bush.

With her father, Dr. James S.C. Chao, sitting next to her, Elaine was excited that she and her father will be on the platform for Trump's inauguration on Capitol Hill.

She also said she was so happy that her father was able to be with her at her confirmation hearing



Elaine Chao, US transportation secretary-designate, and her father, Dr. James S.C. Chao, sit down with China Daily for an exclusive interview in Washington on Thursday. ZHOU PAI / CHINA DAILY

on Jan 11 before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

"This is a special honor. This is not only a special event for her, but also for my family and all overseas Chinese," said the father.

The close family bond was obvious. During the Senate hearing, Elaine, with her father sitting behind her, started by talking about her unique family experience.

Her father grew up in a small farming village of just 10 families in China and then left everything familiar behind to build a better life for the family in the US. "Our family was separated for three long years before we were able to come to America, travelling by cargo ship on an ocean journey that lasted 37 days," she told lawmakers.

"There were many challenges during those early years especially, since

we didn't speak English. I didn't receive my citizenship until I was 19 years old," she said.

She was a bit emotional too on Thursday, saying that "during that time, my father suffered greatly, and even when we came, we lived in a small one-bedroom apartment. He held three jobs. We didn't speak English. It was very hard."

She said her father and mother, Ruth Mulan Chu Chao, who passed



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Elaine Chao, the nominee for US secretary of transportation

away in 2007, never gave up.

"They were so optimistic and diligent and determined and passed that on to the children. So as children, we never felt insecure, because we were enveloped in the love of our parents, and the security of knowing they were always there for us," Elaine said.

The family's story is told in the recent book *Fearless Against the Wind*.

"I loved the title, because my father has been indeed fearless in the face of such adversity," said Elaine, who has five sisters.

She believes that if a young person thinks about moving ahead, the most important thing to have is interest. "You have to be interested. Because if you have interest, then you will have the courage, then the determination to move forward," she said.

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Joint effort on transit in US could boost ties

By PAUL WELITZKIN
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As President-elect Donald Trump looks to rebuild American highways, bridges, tunnels and airports with a possible price tag of \$1 trillion, there may be an opportunity for Chinese foreign direct investment to finance at least part of the effort, US experts said.

Peking University professor and former World Bank chief economist Justin Yifu Lin said earlier this month that China and the US have common interests concerning infrastructure investment and suggested that both nations "should work together so that we have a truly global infrastructure initiative."

"On infrastructure, I do think this is a significant area of potential cooperation between the US and China," Edward Alden, the Bernard L. Schwartz Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, wrote in an email. "China is facing a lot of US anger over its large trade surplus and a new president who has made it an explicit campaign promise to toughen trade policy towards China. Given that China is actively looking for US investment opportunities, infrastructure offers a similar opportunity."

Alden believes that Trump administration would be open to Chinese investment in US infrastructure projects because it would create good jobs in the US. He noted that for Chinese investors, the motivation for this foreign investment would be steady returns rather than a technology acquisition.

"This could help to reduce fears in the United States, and among those in the Trump administration, that the US-China economic relationship is a zero-sum competition," he added.

Lin said infrastructure projects represent an important driver of economic growth and noted that Donald Trump wants to "make America great again".

In the US, governments are short \$1.4 trillion of the money needed to make necessary repairs to infrastructure — including drinking, wastewater and mass transit systems — through 2025, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Speaking at the Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong this week, Ding Xuedong, chairman of China's sovereign wealth fund, China Investment Corp (CIC), saw a natural fit between Chinese investors and Trump's infrastructure plans.

"Over the past three decades, China's infrastructure has been growing very fast. It's one of the biggest successes China has achieved. We have lots of design, execution and management experiences that we can export," said Ding, according to CNBC. "We hope the US will not have any double standards or bias, but have a level playing field for foreign investors, including China. If so, I see lots of opportunities in the US."

Sunny Wang is the general manager of Broad USA, the US arm of Hunan-based Broad Group. Broad manufactures air conditioners powered by natural gas and heat waste and recently completed a power generation project used by the University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Medical Center to lower emissions that received recognition from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

"I would love to do similar projects at hospitals, schools and other facilities in the US," Wang said in an interview. Broad specializes in combined heat and power (CHP) systems which generate electricity in a single, integrated system, where heat that is normally wasted in regular power generation is converted into useful energy."

'Rich folks' in US want their children to learn Mandarin

By AMY HE in New York
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A video of Donald Trump's granddaughter reciting a Chinese poem for a Lunar New Year party went viral last year, illustrating for some that affluent families are still keen on having their children learn Chinese, no matter what the political differences are between China and the US and despite Trump's anti-China rhetoric.

Arabella Kushner made headlines in November when her mother Ivanka Trump shared the video of her reciting the Chinese poem Sympathy for the Peasants for a Spring Festival party from earlier in 2016, with people further digging up another video posted nearly two years ago of the child "working hard" on her Sunday Chinese lessons.

"So-called 'rich folks', whether they feel China will play a friendly, positive role or negative role in the [US-China] relationship, [they know] it would benefit their children to learn their language because it provides the kind of access and provides opportunities in a whole different way," said Jeff Wang, director of China learning programs at the non-profit Asia Society.

"They're very straightforward. The usual suspects, they still think that China will be a major player, US-China



More American children are electing to learn Mandarin, and despite anti-China rhetoric, families of means still see the benefits of their children learning Chinese so they can take advantage of future opportunities. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY BY ASIA SOCIETY

relations will be a major factor. Their kids are incredibly articulate. They want to be lawyers, they want to be in the trenches, and they know language will afford them that access," he added.

At the Avenues independent school for students in grades K-12, where

annual tuition is \$49,250 and thousands more in fees, language immersion is part of the curriculum. Students can choose to study Chinese or Spanish, and from age 3 to the fifth grade, students alternate between learning in English and learning in either Chinese or Spanish.



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Jeff Wang, director of China learning programs at the non-profit Asia Society

Nancy Schulman, director of early education at the school in Manhattan, said that the response to the language immersion has been "incredible," with about 600 students choosing the Mandarin track.

"Parents do this for multiple reasons. Obviously, China is a very fast, important economy in the world and certainly there are parents who are looking forward to opportunities for their children in the future, to be able to participate in a global economy that is important in the world," she said.

"Many [parents] were born—or have worked or were raised—in another country and have an interest in expanding the idea of what it means to be a global citizen for

themselves and for their children also," she added.

There are approximately 200,000 students in the US studying Mandarin, a number that President Barack Obama's administration wants to increase to 1 million by 2020 through the One Million Strong initiative, a successor to the 100,000 Strong initiative founded in 2009, whose goal was to get 100,000 US students studying Chinese. The goal was surpassed in 2014.

"Anecdotally, the demand has never been higher in terms of interest that the foundation has incoming from students who are seeking more information to find out more opportunities in China," said Eugene Huang, acting CEO of the US-China Strong Foundation, which was initially known as the 100,000 Strong Foundation before it was renamed last year.

Huang emphasized that students expressing interest in studying Mandarin don't come from just the privileged class, "those who go to Ivy League institutions or other institutions that are 'the elite' in this country — we're seeing demand from historically black universities, we're seeing interest from community colleges and other places where you wouldn't expect the interest to be in China, but it's there."

Washington braces for protests as New Yorkers go on march

By REUTERS

Washington turned into a virtual fortress on Thursday ahead of Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, while thousands of people took to the streets of New York to express their displeasure with his coming administration.

Some 900,000 people, both Trump backers and opponents, are expected to flood Washington for Friday's inauguration ceremony, according to organizers' estimates. Events include the swearing-in ceremony on the steps of the US Capitol and a parade to the White House along streets thronged with spectators.

The number of planned protests and rallies this year is far above what has been typical at recent presidential inaugurations, with some 30 permits granted in Washington for anti-Trump rallies and sympathy protests planned in cities from Boston to Los Angeles, and abroad in cities including London

and Sydney.

The night before the inauguration, thousands of people turned out in New York for a rally at the Trump International Hotel and Tower, and then marched a few blocks from the Trump Tower where the businessman lives.

The rally featured a lineup of politicians, activists and celebrities including Mayor Bill de Blasio and actor Alec Baldwin, who trotted out the Trump parody he performs on Saturday Night Live.

"Donald Trump may control Washington, but we control our destiny as Americans," de Blasio said. "We don't fear the future. We think the future is bright, if the people's voices are heard."

In Washington, police cars lined much of Pennsylvania Avenue, the parade route, as workers unloaded crowd control fences from flatbed trucks, erected barricades and marked off pavement with tape.

US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said

police aimed to keep groups separate, using tactics similar to those employed during last year's political conventions.

"The concern is some of these groups are pro-Trump, some of them are con-Trump, and they may not play well together in the same space," Johnson said on MSNBC.

Trump opponents have been angered by his comments during the campaign about women, illegal immigrants and Muslims and his pledges to scrap Obamacare health reform and build a wall on the Mexican border.

The Republican's supporters admire his experience in business, including as a real estate developer and reality television star, and view him as an outsider who will take a fresh approach to politics.

Bikers for Trump, a group that designated itself as security backup during last summer's Republican National Convention in Cleveland, is ready to step in if protesters block access to the inauguration, said



Demonstrators against US President-elect Donald Trump march along the inaugural parade route outside the Trump International Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington on Thursday. REUTERS/JAMES LAWLER DUGGAN

Dennis Egbert, one of the group's organizers.

"We're going to be backing up law enforcement. We're on the same page," Egbert, 63, a retired electrician from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

About 28,000 security personnel, miles of fencing, roadblocks, street barricades and dump trucks are part of the cordon around three square miles of central Washington.