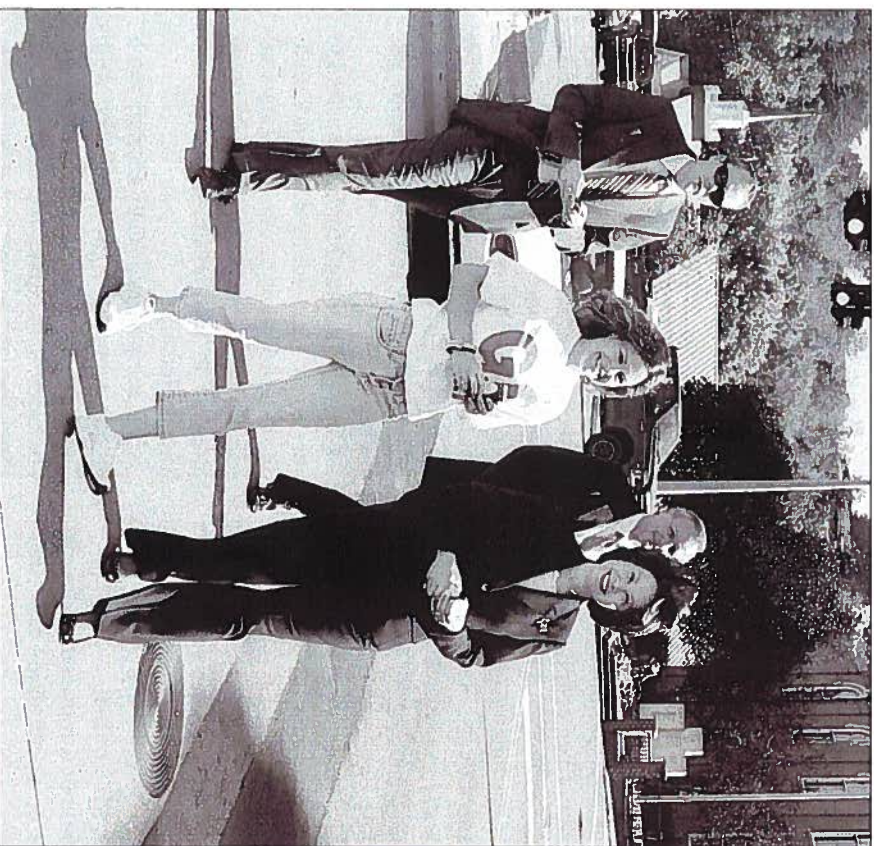


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# Hancock Clarion

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U.S. Secretary of Labor and wife of Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, Elaine Chao, stopped in Lawrenceville on Friday for a meet and greet and interview with the Clarion. Here she walks down Main Street followed by her security detail, comprised of one former secret service agent. Following the attacks of 9/11, all Presidential Cabinet members were given personal security. Chao was greeted by the Judge's Executive Assistant Sage Tongate with some home-grown sorghum.

*Clarion photo by S.W.*

## County gets visit from U.S. Secretary of Labor

By Malena DeJarnette

It's not often, if ever in recent history, a member of the President's Cabinet has made a stop in Hancock County. And many residents were astonished to see a security detail manning the streets of Hawesville on Friday, with their spiffy suits, shades and ear bugs.

Elaine Chao, the United States Secretary of Labor, made a visit to the Clarion office for a brief meet and greet, interview and campaign stop. Who was she campaigning for? She may be more well-known in Kentucky for that husband of her's - Republican Senator and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Chao made her way through Hancock County after a conference in Owensboro at the new Musik and Dance Studio on Second Street. Chao has been traveling statewide campaigning to women specifically.

But Chao is not only earning bragging rights for her husband as a good, political choice, but for his personal character as well.

"I call him my low maintenance hus-

band," she said. "He takes care of himself. He does his own laundry, he cooks; he's a better cook than I am."

And with Mitch raising three daughters, she touts he is very supportive of progress for women.

As interesting as Mitch's near quarter-century in Congress may be, Chao has an astonishing life and record all her own.

When asked what it was like to be on the President's Cabinet, she responded:

"It's an honor...especially for someone like me," she said. "I came as an immigrant to this country."

Chao is of Chinese descent. When China's Civil War ended with a Communist victory in 1949, she said her parents "voted with their feet" and fled to Taiwan, her birthplace.

With her mother 7 months pregnant, her father made no hesitation in taking the opportunity to take the National Examination, a chance to study in the U.S. Scoring #1, he was given the chance - leaving his family behind.

"He came [to America] when I was five

years old," she said. "It took three years before he could bring the rest of us to America."

The Chao family loaded onto a cargo ship, the only transportation they could afford, and settled into a one bedroom apartment in Queens, New York. Times were tough, and Chao's father held three jobs to get by, but their confidence in the promise of America kept them afloat.

Her father was able to start a shipping and trading company, and with his success was able to send his six daughters to good schools.

Chao has such schools on her resume as Mount Holyoke, Harvard, M.I.T., Dartmouth and Columbia.

"We've been very blessed and very successful," she said. "My father always taught us you can do anything you want to in America."

**Her Career**

Chao started out in the banking business, but her curiosity got the best of her. She wanted to understand the American government, democracy and the way it worked, so she applied to be a White House Fellow during the Ronald Reagan days.

The White House Fellow program is a nonpartisan program that allows approximately 12-18 young Americans to come work every year as a special assistant in the White House.

Chao went through a very rigorous interview and application process before she was selected and assigned to work on Policy Development.

And that is what jumpstarted her political career. From there, Chao met Elizabeth Dole, who later became Secretary of Transportation under George H.W. Bush's administration. Dole asked Chao to join her staff.

After the first Bush administration, Chao was asked to head up United Way following it's mismanagement and financial abuse.

Her impressive titles do not end there. She then traveled on to become the Director of the Peace Corps.

"I have had a unique perspective working with nonprofit, for-profit and the private sector," she said.

**The Cabinet**

In 2001, Chao was appointed to George W. Bush's cabinet, becoming the longest serving member of his administration.

Along with this position, came two impressive firsts. She was the first Asian American woman appointed to a President's Cabinet in U.S. history and the first Kentuckian named to the President's Cabinet since 1945.

While serving on the Cabinet, Chao has continued to improve the workforce, job training and health and safety of American workers.

"As the first Secretary of Labor in the 21st century, I am very focused on increasing the competitiveness of our workforce," she said.

Chao pinpointed building linkages to the educational system as a big goal of her's. Resource centers, libraries and skills training facilities are also among her agenda.

"Right now we have people looking for jobs, and we have employers looking for the right kind of workers," she said. "But there is a disconnect."

Along with this great need for skilled workers, such as plumbers, electricians and welders, Chao also listed the need for one million nurses in the next 10 years, and over 3 million healthcare workers.

But job training is far from what it used to be, she admits. A job like a school custodian has vastly changed. She said a large ring of keys is no longer the standard, and that knowledge of computer systems are now a requirement.

With the help of her staff of 17,000, Chao has made great strides.

"It is a lot of responsibility," she said. "You have to be on top of things all the time."

And for this reason being, Chao is looking forward to her long-awaited break.

"Come January 1, I am looking forward to letting go," she said, admitting she will simply be volunteering at that point.

**Her Ol' Kentucky Home**

It is probably safe to say, Chao will be doing a lot of her volunteering in her home state of Kentucky. Throughout her and Mitch's Washington career, they still call Jefferson County, Kentucky home, spending nearly every weekend here.

"It is very grounding for us," she said. "This is home."

The kind people and proponent of volunteerism are just a few reasons why Chao loves Kentucky.

"I've lived everywhere," she said. "I've lived in New York, I've lived overseas, I've lived in California and I am so glad that I have found my home."

**Being Mrs. McConnell**

As any wife of a politician up for election, she is no doubt taking any chance to campaign.

Chao speaks highly of her husband Mitch McConnell, pointing out that his "seniority transfers into clout for the Commonwealth."

"There are only two Kentuckians who have been in leadership positions in the

U.S. Senate, one is Mitch and the other is Alvin Barkley," she said.

She said Mitch has brought \$500 million to the state, \$50 million of which went towards the Owensboro Riverport and hundreds of millions for colleges and universities.

He also brought \$217 million for Fort Campbell, as well as Fort Knox, to help improve living conditions on base. This includes new buildings, such as churches and infirmaries.

Mitch is also responsible for the prescription drug benefit on the Medicare bill, bringing savings to seniors.

Chao also mentioned Mitch's biodiesel initiative, which includes Owensboro, as well as his push for energy independence, alternatives for oil, drilling offshore, investing in new technology, protecting the environment and finding ways to conserve.

In return, she pointed the finger at Mitch's opponent Bruce Lunsford for his approval of the automatic gas tax increase in the '80s, resulting in higher gas prices.

Chao said trading Mitch in for a rookie only a few years younger does not seem like a valid choice. She said Lunsford will be unable to accumulate as much progress in the Senate, or attain such high leadership.

"We are going through a tough patch in our economy right now," she said. "We all wish things were not as they are. The election in November should not be about the current patch that we are in, but the next six years..."

"I will promise you, no one will work harder than Mitch McConnell," she concluded. "He loves this state."