Antonio Borja Won Pat
1908–1987
DELEGATE 1973–1985
DEMOCRAT FROM GUAM

The son of an immigrant from Hong Kong, Antonio Borja Won Pat’s long political career culminated in his election as the first Territorial Delegate from Guam—where “America’s day begins,” a reference to the small, Pacific island’s location across the international dateline. Known as “Pat” on Guam and “Tony” among his congressional colleagues, Won Pat’s small-in-stature and soft-spoken nature belied his ability to craft alliances with powerful House Democrats and use his committee work to guide federal money towards and protect local interests in Guam.1 It was these skills and his close relationship with Phillip Burton of California, a powerful figure on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, that helped Won Pat become the first Territorial Delegate to chair a subcommittee. “To speak of Tony Won Pat’s life … is to recall the very history of Guam,” noted American Samoan Delegate Fofó I. F. Sunia, who memorialized Won Pat on the House Floor after his death. “Every major political accomplishment of the last quarter century in Guam bears Mr. Won Pat’s valuable imprint.”2

Antonio Borja Won Pat was born in Sumay, Guam, on December 10, 1908, to Maria Soriano Borja and Ignacio Won Pat. According to census records, he had at least two brothers, Vicente and Francisco.3 Ignacio Won Pat was of Chinese heritage, originally from Hong Kong, and had come to Guam with the U.S. Navy to serve as a cook.4 Later, as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, Won Pat made note of his family history. “And here I am tinkering with parts of the U.S. Navy budget,” he observed.5 Won Pat graduated from the Intermediate School in Agana, Guam, in 1925. He married a native Guamanian (known locally as a Chamorro), Ana Salas Perez, and they had eight children.6

Won Pat worked as a teacher at a school (later known as the Dyer School) in Piti, Guam, and then became principal at the Maxwell School in Sumay, where he worked until 1940. He was teaching at George Washington High School when Japan invaded Guam in December 1941. Following the war, Won Pat left teaching and organized the Guam Commercial Corporation, a group of wholesale and retail sellers. In his new career as a businessman, he became president of the Guam Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Won Pat's political career also pre-dated the Second World War. He was elected to the advisory Guam congress in 1936 and served until it was disbanded when war broke out. After the war, Won Pat helped organize the Commercial Party of Guam—the island's first political party. Won Pat served as speaker of the first Guam Assembly in 1948 and was re-elected to the post four times. The Commercial Party evolved into the Popular Party in 1950 and then became the Democratic Party of Guam in 1960. The latter dominated local politics for the next two decades.7

Initially, Won Pat supported U.S. naval rule over the island. In 1946 he told the Chicago Tribune that Guam needed to achieve greater economic independence before American citizenship. Yet disillusionment over naval leadership led him to change his mind.8 Won Pat played a key part in the passage of the Organic Act, which granted U.S. citizenship to Guamanians in 1950; he traveled to Washington to testify on behalf of the legislation. In 1964 the Guam legislature authorized an unofficial representative in Washington to lobby for Guam’s needs. Won Pat narrowly won election to the new post over the Territorial Party's Felix Lujan Crisostomo and two other independent candidates on March 15, 1965—an election that included personal attacks on Won Pat's Chinese heritage. Still, he won re-election unopposed in 1968.9 Won Pat later characterized the “ unofficial representative” position as having “its genesis in something of a lobbying
concept,” and that the position was “a Member of Congress in everything but name” without “the ‘power tools’ … that other Members had.”

Won Pat was also a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1972.

Won Pat’s duties included lobbying for a Territorial Delegate from Guam in the U.S. House of Representatives. He won approval for the office in 1972, despite reservations at the Department of the Interior. The department’s Office of the Territories argued that granting Guam a congressional Delegate could be tantamount to bestowing “incorporated” status to the territory, including full constitutional rights and protections.

Having created the Delegate’s post, he then ran for it. In what he characterized as a “good, clean race,” Won Pat faced Republican territorial senator Pedro (Pete) Diaz Perez.

Won Pat emphasized his record during the campaign, especially as Guam’s Washington representative, and expressed excitement at having a voice on congressional committees. Whereas Perez wanted to push for a vote in Congress, Won Pat was more hesitant, noting that it was unprecedented for an unincorporated territory to have a vote.

Won Pat also took out several full-page ads in the island’s largest newspaper, the Pacific Daily News, in which he reprinted letters of support and praise from congressional giants such as Majority Leader Hale Boggs of Louisiana and Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford of Michigan.

Won Pat defeated Perez with 58 percent of the vote.

Won Pat was able to win most of his elections with similarly comfortable margins. He ran unopposed in 1974, 1976, and 1978. In 1980 he won every precinct, defeating GOP candidate Tony Palomo with 58 percent. Two years later, he narrowly defeated former Marine General Ben Garrido Blaz by less than 1,000 votes (51 percent); turnout for the election was reportedly at 85 percent.

Won Pat frequently emphasized his Democratic Party alliances in the House majority during his campaigns. “I know that no one on Guam has the experience in Washington that I have,” he noted after he easily won his 1976 primary, despite being hospitalized with an illness right before the election. “The important thing is to have friends…. Our greatest asset [in Washington] is friends. Because, if we don’t have the friends, who the hell is going to support us.”

At barely five feet tall, with a tendency to mumble in his Chamorro accent, Won Pat did not command attention. But he maintained a sense of humor. Once, he slipped out of sight behind the rostrum while presiding over a subcommittee hearing and shared a self-deprecating joke with the witness: “You can’t see me, much less understand what I am saying.” He also proved astute at using both the alliances he campaigned on and his committee work to his advantage. Won Pat became a close ally with the powerful subcommittee chairman on Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, Phil Burton. Won Pat was lavish in his praise of Burton’s support: “He has consistently shown great sympathy for the people who live in these territories,” Won Pat told his colleagues on the House Floor.

He later noted that Burton “has shown an enormous capacity for detail and a keen awareness of what was needed by the people of Guam.”

Won Pat frequently relied on friends in Congress to aid him when his nonvoting status blocked his ability to look after his constituents’ interests. He once bragged to a reporter that when he felt Guam had been left out from a bill, “I’ll get some of my friends to amend it right on the floor.” He even managed to overcome impediments faced by previous Members who represented a far-flung U.S. territory. Initially, Won Pat’s telephone and travel budgets were even less than those of Members who represented suburban districts in the Washington, DC, area. With such a limited budget, the Guamanian Delegate traveled the 19,500-mile round-trip journey home only four times per Congress. However, starting in the 95th Congress (1977–1979), congressional office allowances were prorated based on distance from the capital, and Won Pat’s $111,115 annual allotment for “official and necessary” expenses was the largest of any House Member.

Without a vote on the House Floor, Won Pat invested himself in committee work. He served on the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs for his entire career—a key panel on which to keep federal funds flowing to his constituency. Starting in July 1977, federal money was...
allocated to territories through large Omnibus Territories Acts—sometimes called “Christmas tree” bills for the territories. These allocations were the first checks sent to the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa as part of a federal anti-recession program and extended to the territories through the work of Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner Baltasar Corrada-del Río, Virgin Islands’ Delegate Ron de Lugo, and Won Pat. When the Subcommittee on Pacific Affairs was created in the 96th Congress (1979–1981), it became the bill’s originating subcommittee. Won Pat was the subcommittee’s first chairman and the first Territorial Delegate to chair a subcommittee. When Pacific Affairs’ jurisdiction moved under the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs in the 97th and 98th Congresses (1981–1985), Won Pat chaired that subcommittee.

Won Pat also served on the Armed Services Committee from the 94th to 98th Congresses (1975–1985), a reflection of the U.S. military presence in Guam. In the 97th Congress (1981–1983), he also served on the Veterans Affairs Committee.

Won Pat used his committee work to maximize his advantage. By serving on the Research and Development Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee, he made himself a target for lobbyists seeking permission to develop new weapons, a position that provided the political capital to seek military spending on Guam. A spot on the Military Installations Subcommittee also allowed him to trade committee votes with others seeking to protect military installations in their districts.

Importantly, too, he helped found the Territorial Caucus and worked closely with Delegate de Lugo, whose post representing the Virgin Islands was created at the same time as Won Pat’s. The two met when they were unofficial representatives of their respective territories in the late 1960s.

Won Pat spent his career informing congressional colleagues about the uniqueness of Guam and other U.S. territories. “To a certain extent, Guam is still an unknown quantity,” noted one of his press aides in 1978, “so we are engaged in a constant job of education.” On February 5, 1973, as his first act in Congress, Won Pat teamed with Delegate de Lugo to propose an amendment to the Constitution that granted citizens in the Virgin Islands and Guam the right to vote in U.S. presidential elections. He argued that because voters in the territories were American citizens, they should not be penalized as second-class citizens. “In an age when each citizen, no matter whether he lives in California, Maine, or the territories, is vitally affected by Presidential decisions,” he told his colleagues, “each American of voting age can make his choice of who will lead his country for the next 4 years.” To drive home the point, he emphasized the Guamanians’ Vietnam War service. “Guam lost more boys on the field of battle than did any other State or territory on a per capita basis,” he reminded his colleagues. The legislation ultimately died in the Judiciary Committee, but Won Pat submitted the same bill in every Congress in which he served.

Won Pat first made mainland headlines in his defense of a local custom: the chewing of betel nuts. The nuts were a part of island culture—especially at weddings and other social gatherings, but the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) claimed they were cancerous and attempted to ban their importation into the mainland United States from Guam. Won Pat publicly took on the FDA by submitting a bill to allow Guamanians to take and chew their betel nuts anywhere in the United States. The Delegate admitted that he had a stash of nuts in his desk, smuggled through U.S. customs by a Guam official. “[B]etel nuts and the people of Guam go together,” he told a reporter, comparing the custom to drinking coffee or tea: “a mild stimulant and a source of relaxation at the same time.” Though his legislation was unsuccessful, he paved the way for a Guam Delegate Robert A. Underwood’s successful override of the embargo in 2001.

The end of the Vietnam War profoundly affected Guam, as the economic infusion that came with using the island to stage troops and supplies suddenly dried up. Following the fall of South Vietnam, refugees flooded into the island. Starting in April 1975, “Operation New Life” sent more than 110,000 refugees by aircraft carrier to Guam. Illness ravaged the refugee populations living in tent cities, and
riots broke out. Won Pat supported legislation introduced by Representative Glenn Anderson of California to amend the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962 to provide for the Southeast Asian refugees. He also submitted his own resolution asking that the President take steps to prevent a disproportionate number of refugees from settling in Guam. “I rise to express my deep pride in the role which our island is playing in the great humanitarian effort to rescue the thousands of South Vietnamese from almost certain death,” Won Pat told his colleagues. “Guam, however, is a small island with limited resources. Our ability to do more than lend a temporary helping hand is hindered by an economy which is in precipitous decline…. Under these circumstances, I am deeply concerned that Guam may find itself called upon to provide permanent residence to more individuals than we can reasonably handle.”

The final camp closed on November 1, 1975. In 1979 Won Pat was part of a group of nine Members of Congress who visited Hanoi to discuss the influx of Indochinese refugees and their destabilizing effect on Southeast Asian nations.

But in 1980, he noted that 123,000 refugees remained in Guam and “with the direct assistance of the United States, they have become productive members of the territorial community.” He requested that they be granted special status to remain in Guam.

Guam’s central role in military strategy remained after the end of hostilities in Southeast Asia because of key Pacific military installations on the island. And despite his nonvoting status, by 1983 Won Pat was recognized as a power broker on military spending. He first attempted the establishment of a national cemetery for military veterans in the 97th Congress, but the bill was held up by the Veterans Administration on the grounds that the agency preferred state or territorial funding. “In my opinion, the least the Federal Government can do is to provide a resting place for former military personnel,” he told his colleagues, “and not to leave the burden to the individual States and territories.”

Won Pat steered a bill to passage that established the Guam National Guard. The island was the only remaining U.S. territory without a guard unit. “Because of the intense loyalty of the Guamanian people to the American cause, this unit will quickly be filled to its capacity by some of the best trained personnel in the U.S. military,” he boasted. In addition, the bill increased the number of appointees allotted to Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico to the United States military service academies. Won Pat also assured continued operation of a naval ship repair facility in Guam, when H.R. 8105 passed both houses in the 96th Congress, with aid from Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii. “As one who has for some time been warning our colleagues about the danger of the Pentagon’s present policy of removing forces from Guam instead of relying upon our bases in foreign areas of the Pacific,” Won Pat noted on the House Floor, “I am pleased to see this clear signal from Congress that it recognizes the strategic value of our bases on Guam.”

One Won Pat aide remembered that, in the late 1970s, naval officers wondered why ships sailed from their base in San Diego to Guam for maintenance and repair. The aide recalled the officers’ conclusion: “I don’t know, it’s the guy Won Pat that did this.”

Won Pat’s career focus in Congress, however, was Guam’s status as a U.S. territory. From his time as an unofficial territorial representative, he favored statehood for Guam, but, as he told the territorial legislature in 1972, “our idealism must be tempered with practicality.” As an alternative, Won Pat sought commonwealth status for Guam—a self-governing political unit associated with the United States—at least until the territory could “assume the full responsibilities of a state.”

In September 1975, Won Pat submitted H.R. 9491, calling for the creation of a status commission, and H.R. 9492, which provided for establishing a constitution for Guam. He emphasized that his bills offered Guamanians a chance to choose their status—commonwealth, independence, or statehood—but did not guarantee a change in status or a particular relationship. “We on Guam, as American citizens, know from long experience the meaning and importance of self-determination,” he said. “Ever since Guam came under the U.S. flag in 1898 our people have pursued with singularity of purpose a single
basic goal, full participation in the democratic processes of our country consistent with its high ideals and principles.”

The House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs merged the two bills under H.R. 9491. An amended version passed the House on October 6, 1975, requiring an allowance for the President to veto portions of the constitution and assuring automatic repeal of measures in conflict with the 1950 Organic Act. Senate amendments required that Congress approve Guam’s final constitution and merged Won Pat’s bill with a similar bill introduced by Delegate de Lugo calling for the establishment of a constitution for the U.S. Virgin Islands. De Lugo’s bill, H.R. 9460, passed both chambers and became law on October 21, 1976.

The second Guam Constitutional Convention met from July to December 1977 with Won Pat’s daughter, Judith, serving as chairwoman of the committee on women’s rights—one of two women among the 34 delegates. The final document defined the structure of the Guamanian government, including residency requirements for elected officials, rules on budgets and appointments, orders of succession, and the future structure of the Guam legislature. Antonio Won Pat was among those who witnessed the constitution’s signing on December 15, 1977. Both U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Congress approved it in early 1978.

Yet the Guam constitution’s ratification was ultimately derailed by continued confusion over status and a local political fight. Before it could be voted on by Guamanians, the constitution’s approval was endangered by a bitter 1978 gubernatorial election. The president of the constitutional convention, Democrat Carl Gutierrez, declared his candidacy for governor as an independent. He chose a Republican running mate—another convention delegate, Dr. Joseph Dizon—and attempted to ride the constitution into the governor’s mansion over incumbent Governor Ricardo J. (Ricky) Bordallo. Gutierrez’s candidacy effectively split the Democratic vote, opening the door for Republican Paul McDonald Calvo’s victory. With an upcoming party change in the governor’s mansion, the legislature delayed a plebiscite to approve the constitution.

The necessary Chamorro support for the constitution waned during the delay. Locals—already confused about the contents of the 14-point document—soured on the constitution’s lack of clarity about Guam’s status. Especially wary of Congress’s requirement that the document not alter the existing Organic Act, Chamorros viewed the constitution as a Washington-mandated revision of the Organic Act rather than a declaration of self-determination. Moreover, opposition mounted from a completely different population—special interest groups primarily dominated by “statesiders.” The local bar association did not approve of the creation of a separate Guam supreme court with appeals directly to the U.S. Supreme Court instead of the Federal 9th Circuit Court. The teachers union and military personnel stationed on Guam feared the effect of greater local autonomy on their interests. With less than half of Guamanians turning out to vote on August 4, 1979, the constitution received a meager 18-percent approval. Won Pat, who was in DC during the election and referendum, did not provide comment to local newspapers.

Won Pat attempted to jump-start a review of Guam’s status in 1983, but the death of his ally, subcommittee chairman Phil Burton, diminished his ability to capture widespread congressional interest. The Guam Delegate introduced a resolution (H. Con. Res. 131) calling on President Ronald Reagan to designate a national official to negotiate status change with Guam in October 1983. “Political status for emerging island entities is more than just theories one reads in freshman college textbooks,” he declared. “Political status is a life principle that undergirds all dynamic human society—it is the foundation by which a community of people binds themselves to one another, establishes their identity and develops respect for themselves. More importantly, political status governs the daily relationship between people and their government as equals.” The resolution was referred to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs where it languished, awaiting comment from the Interior Department.

New Mexico Representative Manuel Luján, Vice Chair of the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee (and later Interior Secretary), then suggested that Guam submit a
bill for commonwealth status directly to Congress. At Luján’s invitation, Won Pat brought a bipartisan group of Guam legislators to Luján’s hometown in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in December 1983 to meet with staffers and members of the Interior Committee. The meeting resulted in another bipartisan Commission on Self-Determination, which drafted a document that granted Guam local self-determination under their own constitution. Under its terms, Department of Interior oversight would cease as would provisions of earlier legislation that limited shipping to Guamanian ports to those under American flags. However, Won Pat never had the self-determination document acted on before he left Congress.56

General Blaz returned as Won Pat’s opponent in 1984. The incumbent campaigned on a platform similar to what had been effective in the past: “Seniority is the most important role in Congress,” he noted in a debate between the two candidates. “[It] gives you power. I am able to accomplish more and more over the years.”57 The local press agreed, telling voters, “Don’t risk our rank and influence in Congress … vote for strength and tradition.”58 Shortly before his death in April 1983, Burton had boldly told a reporter that Won Pat was so effective that Guam would lose influence and money if they voted him out. In an analysis entitled “Who Would Serve Guam Best in D.C.?” published on the front page of the Pacific Daily News, sources interviewed for the article—including those “knowledgeable about Pacific and territorial affairs”—agreed with Burton’s take on the election but they also heralded Blaz’s potential as a “new” and “articulate” voice for Guam in Washington. Won Pat’s support and strategy ended up backfiring as Guamanians connected his friendliness with the powerful Californian with mainland meddling in the island’s affairs.59

The close contest between Won Pat and Blaz proved dramatic. In the open primary election, Won Pat lost to Blaz by nearly 2,000 votes.60 When both moved to the general election, Blaz came out ahead by a narrow margin of 323 votes.61 The next day, officials found 220 more ballots and computer irregularities that forced election officials to twice count the ballots by hand; recounts put Blaz in the lead by roughly 350 votes. On November 11, the Pacific Daily News reported Blaz had won by 354 votes. “Whatever is decided, I am resigned to accept that decision and to continue to work for my constituents as usual,” Won Pat conceded.62

Even with his apparent concession, Won Pat had not yet fully resigned himself to the resulting loss. On December 21, 1984, he contested the election before the Committee on House Administration. Won Pat claimed that election officials had improperly dismissed seemingly blank ballots or those marked for both candidates. He also argued that absentee ballots were sent too late to be counted when returned. The Guam Election Commission mailed ballots 21 days before Election Day, even though federal officials had recommended sending them 45 days in advance for timely return by mail. Those ballots received after the polls closed on November 6 were not counted—amounting to 34 percent of all absentee voters, according to Won Pat. Blaz countered with a motion to dismiss Won Pat’s claim on January 21, 1985, and later that year, the committee agreed with him, noting the irregular and absentee ballots had been handled legally.63 The full House defeated Won Pat’s challenge on July 24, 1985, in a voice vote.64

After his electoral loss, Won Pat lived in Guam but returned to Washington frequently and continued to attend hearings on appropriations for the territories.65 Won Pat died of a heart attack in a hospital in Silver Spring, Maryland, on May 1, 1987. He was buried in Piti, Guam, at the locally run veterans’ cemetery for which he had sought federal funding.66 Among those offering tributes on the House Floor was Delegate Blaz. “Those who knew Mr. Won Pat know that he was not a giant of a man in stature, but he was a giant of a man in accomplishments,” Blaz said in eulogy. “They know that he did not talk very much, but he said a lot. They also know that he was a very, very humble man. He was a common man, but a common man with an uncommon touch.”67 A congressional delegation, mostly made up of other Territorial Delegates, attended his Guam state funeral.68 In 1988 the Guam International Air Terminal was officially named A. B. Won Pat Guam International Airport Terminal.69
University of Guam, Micronesian Area Research Center (Mangilao, GU). *Papers*: 1965–1984, 285 linear feet. The papers of Antonio Borja Won Pat focus mainly on his years in the U.S. House of Representatives. The papers consist of correspondence, briefing material, audiovisual materials, photographs, invitations, cards, and plaques. Topics include the Guam legislature, political campaigns and elections, legislation, committee reports, official trips, district office work, typhoon rehabilitation, refugees, agriculture, schools and education, civil aeronautics, federal appropriations and budgets, and executive branch agency work. A finding aid is available at the repository.

University of Oklahoma, The Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive, Department of Communication (Norman, OK). *Videosette*: 10 commercials on 1 videocassette. The commercials were used during Antonio Borja Won Pat’s Democratic campaign for the 1984 U.S. congressional election in Guam.

NOTES
6 There is no reliable source for a list of names for Won Pat’s children. A daughter, Judith, later served as speaker of the territorial legislature. Daughter Marilyn Won Pat was also elected to the territorial senate but died in 1990 before she could take her seat. Another daughter, Rosalind Won Pat-Fleet, was commended by Guam Delegate Madeline Bordallo in the *Congressional Record*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (30 June 2005): E1400–E1401; *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*.
8 Ibid., 3. As speaker of the territorial legislature in 1949, Won Pat led a walkout of the general assembly when the military governor refused to support their subpoena of an American witness.
14 See, for example, 1 November 1972, *Pacific Daily News*: 11.
19 Lachica, “Despite Obstacles, Won Pat Is Making A Mark in Congress.”
23 “Guam Delegate to Have a Dandy Expense Account,” 25 November 1976, *Atlanta Constitution*: 8P. Won Pat’s allotment was four times that of local District of Columbia Delegate Walter Fauntroy.
24 Leibowitz, *Defining Status*: 34.
28 Lachica, “Despite Obstacles, Won Pat Is Making A Mark in Congress.”
Rogers, Destiny’s Landfall: 228.


41 Lachica, “Despite Obstacles, Won Pat Is Making A Mark in Congress.”


43 Public Law 96-600, 94 Stat. 3493 (1980).


48 Rogers, Destiny’s Landfall: 234. In 1974 the Republican-led Guam legislature created the Legislative Political Status Commission, the first on the island with the goal of determining the ultimate status of the island. The commission reported that Guam should write a constitution to aid islanders in meeting local economic and social needs. The commission requested that U.S. President Gerald R. Ford send a representative to negotiate terms. Commission members also did not consult Won Pat in their decision, as he was a Democrat and in political opposition with the legislature’s majority.

49 Congressional Record, House, 94th Cong., 1st sess. (9 September 1975): 28034.


52 Guampedia Foundation, Inc., “Guam Constitution Conventions (ConCon).”


54 Rogers, Destiny’s Landfall: 249.


65 “Antonio Won Pat, 73, Dies; Guam Delegate to Congress,” 3 May 1987, Associated Press; Person, “Former Delegate From Guam Antonio B. Won Pat, 78, Dies.”

66 Several sources mark his death date as May 2. These are likely using Guam’s Chamorro Standard Time (ChST). According to the Pacific Daily News, Won Pat died at 5:00 AM on May 2, 1987, ChST. This converts to May 1, 1987, at 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time.

