

Jay C. Kim

1939–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1993–1999

REPUBLICAN FROM CALIFORNIA

A war survivor and refugee, Jay C. Kim became the first Korean American elected to Congress. “In a free enterprise system, hard work pays off,” the often outspoken Congressman noted, summing up his political philosophy. “I’ve always believed that. If you don’t work hard, you’re going to fall behind.”¹ After building his own engineering business, Kim won a U.S. House seat just two years after his initial entrée into politics. As a new Congressman, he voiced skepticism over House Rules and practices that solidified power among a small group of senior Members. However, Kim’s own difficulties with campaign finance violations effectively ended his career in elected office.

Chang Joon Kim was born in Seoul, Korea, on March 27, 1939.² His birth name meant “Golden Splendid Law,” but he later legally changed his name to Jay.³ Kim’s father was a restaurant manager before the Korean War, but, as Jay Kim recalled, his well-educated family members were marked as enemies by North Korean forces. The family’s home was destroyed, and they walked 90 miles to safety. Kim’s adopted brother was later executed by North Korean communist officials.⁴

Jay Kim graduated from Po Sung High School, Seoul, South Korea, in 1956 before finishing his education in the United States. In 1961, fresh out of one year of service in the South Korean Army, Jay Kim immigrated to the United States at the age of 22.⁵ He married Jung Ok (June) in 1962; the couple had met in Seoul. He earned a BS in engineering from the University of Southern California in 1967. Two years later, he earned an MS in environmental engineering from the same institution. Kim later earned a PhD from Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea, in 1993.

Kim worked in restaurants and grocery stores when he first arrived in the United States. Later, with a Small Business Administration loan, he founded JAYKIM

Engineers, a firm that designed highways and water reclamation plants. Primarily procuring government contracts, JAYKIM Engineers was one of five minority-owned firms hired to demolish buildings damaged during the 1992 riots in Los Angeles and its suburbs.⁶

Kim entered electoral politics to “make government run more like a business,” placing first in a nine-candidate race for the Diamond Bar, California, city council in 1990. One year later, he was elected mayor.⁷

In 1992 local Republican officials courted Kim to run for the U.S. House in a newly created congressional district. The new district sat at a crossroads between Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange counties. It encompassed most of the city of Ontario, an airport, an industrial base, and several high-income neighborhoods. The Los Angeles County Fairgrounds, a low-security prison in Chino, and President Richard Nixon’s Presidential Library were also located within its boundaries.

With only two years of political experience, Kim faced veteran political opponents in the GOP primary: Pomona assemblyman Charles Bader and lawyer James Lacy. Kim campaigned on lower taxes and privatizing government services. He opposed amnesty for undocumented immigrants, but supported abortion rights, arguing the government had no business getting involved in women’s reproductive decisions. Kim won the primary with a 30-percent plurality—with 889 more votes than his closest opponent.⁸ In his conservative district, Kim handily won the general election with 60 percent against Democrat Bob Baker, an intelligence analyst and Vietnam veteran.⁹

Alleged campaign ethics issues surfaced shortly after Kim took office, ensuring that he would face primary challenges throughout his House career. His campaigns, including his run for city council, were plagued by careless bookkeeping and disclosure irregularities.¹⁰





Less than a year after his election, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that JAYKIM Engineering had spent \$400,000 on his campaign, which constituted an illegal corporate contribution. Federal officials investigated, and Kim admitted that he should have paid the company from the campaign coffers to rent office space. Still, no formal legal or ethics charges were brought against him.¹¹

Given this rocky start, Kim faced challengers in the 1994 Republican primary but captured a 41 percent plurality in the four-person field. In the general election, Kim easily won with 62 percent of the vote against Pomona-based urban developer Ed Tessier.¹² In the 1996 primary, Yorba Linda-based businessman Bob Kerns had little financing but attacked Kim's ongoing ethics challenges. Kim won with 58 percent of the vote and, in the general election, defeated Democrat Richard L. Waldron with 59 percent of the vote.¹³

Throughout his career, Kim served on the Public Works and Transportation (later Transportation and Infrastructure) Committee. He sought a seat on this panel with the goal of streamlining and trimming government spending.¹⁴ Kim also served on the Small Business Committee in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995).

As the first Korean American elected to Congress, Kim traveled to South Korea following his election and the Korean-American community in southern California quickly embraced him as a surrogate representative.¹⁵ At first, Kim didn't embrace that role. When he arrived in Washington, Republicans tried to place him on the Foreign Affairs Committee—specifically the Asia subcommittee—an assignment he initially declined. Kim claimed he did not have a special agenda nor did he wish to be labeled a spokesperson on South Korea and for Korean Americans. Yet, after his re-election and as part of the new GOP majority in 1995, he accepted the assignment on the renamed International Relations Committee. He served on the panel for two terms.¹⁶

Representative Kim had an outsized presence for a freshman lawmaker.¹⁷ He amassed one of the House's most conservative records and earned a reputation for being outspoken. As a political newcomer, Kim recalled

being “shocked” to see Members gather in various caucus groups on the House Floor; a colleague had to tell him about party bloc seating tradition in the chamber wherein Republicans sat to the left of the House rostrum.¹⁸

With an outsider's perspective on Congress, Kim embraced the role of being among the institution's loudest critics. One of his first speeches highlighted his cynicism over the political process on Capitol Hill. “In the few short months that I have been here I have learned that this beltway is the land of the easy promise,” Kim said. “It's the place where special interests prevail, where truth is tempered by political expediency, where honesty and values take a back seat to business-as-usual politics.”¹⁹

Kim's disillusionment solidified during his freshman orientation, during which a senior Member steered him toward more powerful committee assignments in order to draw larger campaign contributions.²⁰ Kim was among several freshmen who sought to abolish select committees, launching a salvo against the seniority system which gave long-serving Members greater power. Kim also proposed cutting committee sizes and budgets by 25 percent, claiming that such cost-saving measures would improve Congress's reputation. “The war cry is, eliminate gridlock,” he observed, starting “by eliminating the overwhelming power of the seniority system.”²¹

One of Kim's primary legislative interests was helping private entrepreneurs with government contracts, the same kind of work he did as an engineer.²² One of his earliest legislative proposals was the Highway Construction Private Investment Act that helped entrepreneurs get contracts to repair and build roadways. “The private sector is always looking for sound investments. The public sector is always looking for more projects,” he noted. “This private-public partnership I am proposing beneficially addresses both needs. It's a win-win concept.”²³

Kim also sought federal reimbursement for road maintenance to keep up with increased traffic from Mexico after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect in 1994, and to allow repair shops and vehicle dealerships to access and operate onboard vehicle diagnostics under the Clean Air Act. He successfully



funneled aid for several local projects: \$151 million for sewer recycling in Orange County, \$91 million for road improvements and carpool connector lanes on major highways passing through his district.²⁴

Kim was a vocal opponent of President William J. (Bill) Clinton's health care plan, specifically opposing any mandated contribution from employers for coverage, a centerpiece of the plan. "Employer mandates are nothing more than a tax on jobs," he said. "They are nothing more than a job-killing payroll tax, a tax that American workers will pay in the form of reduced wages and lost jobs. In other words, there is no such thing as a free lunch."²⁵

Kim offered an amendment to prohibit taxpayer money on employer mandates. When he submitted his amendment, Kim was dismayed to learn of the Rules Committee's lopsided roster that strongly favored the majority party. When the leadership pulled the bill from the floor before Kim was able to get a vote on it, he concluded they were "scared to vote on my amendment," describing the episode as the "truth held hostage."²⁶

Immigration and foreign policy rose to the top of Kim's congressional agenda. "If you're an immigrant in this country, you can lose everything except an accent," Kim noted.²⁷ Drawing from his experience, he supported aid to legal immigrants, including a successful effort in 1996 to differentiate benefits given to legal and undocumented immigrants. "It is an insult to legal immigrants to lump them together with illegal aliens, who are lawbreakers," Kim argued.²⁸ In the 103rd Congress, he sought to amend a housing bill limiting undocumented immigrants to seven days of assistance under emergency food and shelter programs for the homeless, citing a desire to "put Americans' needs first."²⁹ His amendment was approved 220 to 176, and the bill passed the House.³⁰

Kim was one of North Korea's strongest critics. He supported cutting off food aid to that nation until the Pyongyang government entered talks with South Korea. Kim was horrified when the Clinton administration threatened to veto a Foreign Relations Committee bill because it did not provide enough aid to North Korea in 1996—this shortly after a North Korean submarine

foundered in South Korean waters and was discovered with "armed commandos" aboard.³¹ Kim offered a resolution to condemn North Korean action. "The Clinton administration American taxpayer-funded aid to North Korea has grown faster than to any other country in Asia," Kim explained on the House Floor. "Is this what Americans are subsidizing? Commando raids and military attacks on our own troops and our allies?"³²

Revelations of further campaign finance violations dogged Kim during his final term in the House. In 1995 and 1996, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register* broke the initial story that five Korean companies made illegal contributions to his campaign. The companies pled guilty (and paid fines amounting to \$1.6 million) after compensating their employees special bonuses with the expectation that these employees would donate the amount to Kim's campaign.³³ Kim claimed no knowledge of the scheme.³⁴

Kim's claims of innocence came under fire, however, when revelations were published that the plan was allegedly hatched at a club meeting for Korean businessmen in July 1992 during which he was a featured speaker. Moreover, two former campaign treasurers testified that Kim's wife, June, had kept track of off-the-book, illegal donations. Seokuk Ma, his campaign treasurer in 1994, was convicted of concealing illegal contributions in April 1997. Ma told authorities that, due to Korean cultural norms, he could not question his superiors, and he did not challenge June Kim when she asked him to sign blank election report forms. "My culture is very different," he testified, "I respect Congressman Kim very much. If they ask me to do something like that, I cannot refuse."³⁵

On August 11, 1997, both Jay and June Kim pleaded guilty to misdemeanor violations of federal election law, including three counts of accepting illegal campaign contributions totaling more than \$230,000.³⁶ Kim was sentenced to one-year probation (during two months of which he was required to wear an electronic ankle monitor), 200 hours of community service, and a \$5,000 fine. He kept his congressional seat but was only permitted to travel between his Washington-area home in Fairfax



County and the Capitol, attending sessions wearing his ankle monitor and holding meetings with constituents via satellite communication.³⁷ Though he had initially pledged to observe a three-term limit, Kim ran for re-election in 1998. He finished third in an eight-way open primary, losing to the eventual winner, Republican Gary Miller, and his closest Democratic opponent, Eileen Ansari. Kim was the only House incumbent to lose in a primary election that year.³⁸

Afterward, Kim and his wife divorced, and he taught political science courses at a South Korean university for the next year.³⁹ In 1999 he returned to his home in Washington's Virginia suburbs and also took up residence in San Bernardino County so as to be eligible to run in the 2000 election for a U.S. House seat in a district neighboring his old one.⁴⁰ The new district—centered on the city of San Bernardino, or the heart of the “Inland Empire,” and the fast-growing, eastern Los Angeles suburbs—was one-third Hispanic, with a majority of registered Democrats.⁴¹ The long-shot campaign drew detractors from Kim's own party.⁴² Kim garnered just 8 percent of the vote, losing the open primary to Rancho Cucamonga businessman Elia Pirozzi and the eventual winner, Joe Baca.⁴³ He went on to chair the Washington Korean-American Forum, a think tank focused on improving U.S. relations with South Korea. Kim remarried a colleague, Jennifer Ahn.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in *Almanac of American Politics, 1996* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1995): 199.
- 2 *Politics in America, 1994* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993): 220.
- 3 Claire Spiegel and K. Connie Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim,” 27 October 1993, *Los Angeles Times*: 1.
- 4 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 1st sess. (28 July 1995): H7979.
- 5 Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim.”
- 6 *Politics in America, 1994*: 220.
- 7 Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim.”
- 8 *Almanac of American Politics, 1994* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1993): 186; *Politics in America, 1994*: 220.
- 9 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 10 *Politics in America, 1996* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1995): 183; Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim.”
- 11 Kim sold the company shortly after his election to his son-in-law. See *Almanac of American Politics, 1996*: 199; Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim”; *Politics in America, 1996*: 183; “FBI Searches Former Offices of Rep. Kim,” 3 October 1993, *Washington Post*: A11. JAYKIM Engineers collapsed in mid-1993 shortly after he sold it, defaulting on a \$1 million loan guaranteed by Kim and his wife.
- 12 James V. Grimaldi, “Kim Sweeps 4 Aside in Heading for Easy Win,” 8 June 1994, *Orange County Register* (CA): A3.
- 13 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present.”
- 14 *Politics in America, 1994*: 220.
- 15 Jake Doherty, “Korean-Americans Hail Kim's Victory,” 8 November 1992, *Los Angeles Times*: 11.
- 16 Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart, III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011): 790.
- 17 *Almanac of American Politics, 1994*: 186.
- 18 Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim.”
- 19 *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong, 1st sess. (22 April 1993): H2011.
- 20 Robert W. Stewart, “After Winning Office Comes the Actual Office,” 17 December 1992, *Los Angeles Times*: B1.
- 21 *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong., 1st sess. (11 March 1993): H1217.
- 22 *Almanac of American Politics, 1996*: 199.
- 23 *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong, 1st sess. (20 May 1993): H2605; H.R. 2225, 103rd Cong. (1993).
- 24 *Almanac of American Politics, 1998* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1997): 246.
- 25 *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong, 2nd sess. (10 August 1994): H7305.
- 26 *Congressional Record*, House, 103rd Cong, 2nd sess. (3 August 1994): H6743.
- 27 *Politics in America, 1994*: 220; Spiegel and Kang, “The Fast, Rocky Rise of Jay Kim.”



- 28 Quoted in *Politics in America, 1998* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997): 206.
- 29 *Politics in America, 1996*: 183.
- 30 See H.R. 3838, 103rd Cong. (1993); H. Amdt. 778, 103rd Cong. (1994).
- 31 See Kevin Sullivan, "N. Korean Submarine Found Beached Off S. Korea," 19 September 1996, *Washington Post*: A22; Nicholas D. Kristoff, "One Commando Still at Large In Korea Submarine Manhunt," 6 November 1996, *New York Times*: A14.
- 32 *Congressional Record*, House, 104th Cong., 2nd sess. (27 September 1996): H11399.
- 33 Mark Grossman, *Political Corruption in America*, vol. 1 (Amenia, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2008): 273.
- 34 *Politics in America, 1998*: 205.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 204.
- 36 Chae Reed, "Jay Kim," in *Distinguished Asian Americans*, ed. Hyan-chan Kim (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999): 158; "CA41: Kim Pleads Guilty to Illegal Contributions," 11 August 1997, Reuters; Dena Bunis, "Ex Rep. Jay Kim May Seek House Seat Again," 4 December 1999, *Orange County Register* (CA): B4; Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Investigation of Illegal or Improper Activities in Connection With 1996 Federal Election Campaigns*, vol. 4, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Rept. 167 (1998): 5683, 5690. The Senate committee investigating foreign contributions to federal elections quoted the *Washington Post's* claim that Kim's case constituted "the largest amount of criminal campaign violations ever committed by a member of Congress."
- 37 John Mercurio, "Kim Struggles in Comeback," 6 March 2000, *Roll Call*: n.p.; Reed, "Jay Kim": 158. The Committee on Standards of Official Conduct did not immediately pursue an investigation against Kim because a moratorium on filing ethics complaints against Members was in place while the committee's rules and structure were being overhauled. See "Gingrich Case Prompts Ethics Overhaul," *CQ Almanac, 1997*, 53rd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1998): ch. 1, 32–35.
- 38 *Politics in America, 2000* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1999): 195.
- 39 Mercurio, "Kim Struggles in Comeback."
- 40 Tom Gorman, "Former Rep. Kim, Convicted in 1997, May Run Again," 4 December 1999, *Los Angeles Times*: B1.
- 41 *Politics in America, 2002* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2001): 145; *Almanac of American Politics, 2002* (Washington, DC: National Journal, Inc., 2001): 267.
- 42 Gorman, "Former Rep. Kim, Convicted in 1997, May Run Again"; Mercurio, "Kim Struggles in Comeback."
- 43 *Almanac of American Politics, 2002*: 269.

Robert A. Underwood

1948–

DELEGATE 1993–2003
DEMOCRAT FROM GUAM

Robert A. Underwood served five terms as Guam's Delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives before running unsuccessfully for governor of the territory. As Guam's third Delegate, Underwood continued his two predecessors' push for commonwealth status for the tiny island in the western Pacific. His experience as an educator, along with his respect for Guam's Chamorro culture, shaped much of his legislative agenda during his time in the House. Using his position to draw attention to the pressing needs of the territory, Underwood fought for increased recognition for Guam and for its inclusion in federally funded programs. "When you're a small territory, the nexus of your relationship to the federal government is the basis for your representation in Washington," Underwood noted. "It's always trying to understand that and take advantage of it and try to fix the problems with that. That's the nature of the representation that comes from a small territory."¹

Robert A. Underwood was born July 13, 1948, in Tamuning, a town on the west coast of Guam. Both his father, John, and his mother, Esther Flores Taitano, were teachers.² After graduating from Tamuning's John F. Kennedy High School in 1965, Underwood attended California State University in Los Angeles, earning a BA in history in 1969 and an MA in history in 1971. Influenced by his parents' vocation, Underwood embarked on a 20-year career in education.³ From 1972 to 1976, he was a high school teacher, a school administrator, and a curriculum writer for Guam's public schools. He then worked at the University of Guam from 1977 to 1992 as an instructor for and a director of the Bilingual Bicultural Training Program and a director of Project BEAM (Bilingual Education Assistance from Micronesia). He was also a professor of education, the dean of the College of Education, and the academic vice president of the

university. During this period, Underwood also earned an EdD from the University of Southern California in 1987 and graduated from Harvard's Management Development Program in 1988.⁴ Underwood married Lorraine Aguilar, also a teacher, and the couple had five children: Sophia, Roberto, Ricardo, Ramon, and Raphael.⁵

In 1992 Underwood left the University of Guam to challenge four-term incumbent Ben Garrido Blaz in the election for Guam's congressional Delegate seat. Long active in the debate on Guam's political status, Underwood was familiar with the issues affecting the island and pledged to use his experience in public policy to help Guam at the national level.⁶ He relied on strong ties to the community that he built during his career as an educator and his familial connections, which included his grandfather James H. Underwood, a former U.S. Marine and the postmaster of Guam.⁷ He directed a successful grassroots campaign, walking to small villages and meeting with voters.⁸ Underwood's electoral prospects received an unanticipated boost when an impending typhoon postponed voting in Guam for nearly a week. Thus, Guamanians knew before going to the polls that William J. (Bill) Clinton had succeeded in his bid to unseat President George H. W. Bush. This was an important development since both Underwood and Blaz had emphasized the significance of Guam's having a Delegate from the same party as the President.⁹ Ultimately, Underwood benefited from a desire for political change and bested Blaz with 55 percent of the vote.¹⁰ "I feel gratified, but that has to end real quick," Underwood remarked. "There's a lot of work ahead."¹¹ In subsequent elections, Underwood cruised to victory. In 1994 and 1996, he ran unopposed. He faced minimal opposition in his final two elections, defeating Manuel Cruz, a labor union president, with 76 and 78 percent of the vote, respectively.¹²





During his first term in the House, Underwood was assigned to the Armed Services, Natural Resources, and Education and Labor Committees. He remained on Armed Services and Natural Resources throughout his five terms in the House but left Education and Labor after the 103rd Congress (1993–1995).¹³ Lacking the ability to vote on the final passage of legislation, Underwood used his committee work as a vital tool to represent his constituents. His spot on Natural Resources—an essential seat for Territorial Delegates—allowed him to weigh in on and influence legislation affecting Guam and the other U.S. territories. Located west of the International Date Line, Guam is a strategic U.S. military stronghold because of its proximity to East Asia. As the U.S. military presence on the island grew after World War II and the Cold War, Guam's economy became closely linked to the armed forces. Underwood's seat on the Armed Services Committee allowed him to cultivate military connections and monitor any changes that might affect the island. In addition to his committee work, Underwood also chaired the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus during the 106th Congress (1999–2001).

Underwood wasted no time taking up the issue of Guam's political status. Since the passage of the Organic Act in 1950, which granted Guamanians U.S. citizenship and limited self-government, the island's political future remained a significant topic of debate. Underwood, a longtime advocate of Chamorro rights and increased independence for Guam, backed the commonwealth movement. On March 30, 1993, he introduced his first piece of legislation, the Guam Commonwealth Act (H.R. 1521). The measure called for the creation of a commonwealth with full self-government, the preservation of Chamorro culture, and the "mutual consent" of Guam and the United States for federal policies affecting the territory. Although the measure did not make it to the House Floor for a vote, Underwood introduced the legislation multiple times during his House tenure. In 1997 he took to the floor asking his colleagues to consider commonwealth status for Guam. "The 100th anniversary of the Spanish-American War marks an important time

period for the United States to, in a sense, come face to face with its imperial past and come face to face with what hopefully will be in the next century a more perfect union not only for the 50 States and the District of Columbia, but all the people who live under the American flag," Underwood declared.¹⁴

As a nonvoting Delegate, Underwood faced unique challenges. "So essentially we are Members, but not entirely," Underwood said, explaining the role of Territorial Delegates. "The island or jurisdiction each respective delegate represents is not often afforded the attention that their jurisdictions deserve, and by our unique status we must introduce very unique legislation tailor-made for our respective jurisdictions."¹⁵ Underwood drafted legislation that focused primarily on issues that pertained solely to Guam and particularly on protecting the interests of its native inhabitants. One such matter concerned lands that had been taken from the Chamorros by the U.S. military after World War II. "Returning Federal excess lands to the people of Guam is not just a good thing to do," Underwood told his House colleagues. "It is the right thing to do, the just thing to do." The freshman Delegate achieved a major legislative victory when his bill, the Guam Excess Lands Act, became law in 1994. The new law transferred more than 3,000 acres of federal land to Guam for parks, new schools, and affordable housing.¹⁶

Bolstered by this success, Underwood sought to tackle a related long-standing dispute between Guam and the United States. The federal government owned a substantial portion of the island, whose land mass was barely more than 200 square miles. In the wake of security demands after World War II, the U.S. military took control of large tracts of land in Guam. With the end of the Cold War, the local government called for the return of the unused land. Criticism of the American government intensified after the U.S. military relinquished a substantial stretch of land in 1994 to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for use as a refuge.¹⁷ In response to frustration over U.S. land practices, Underwood introduced the first Guam omnibus legislation in congressional history. He considered the Guam Land Returns Act, a provision giving Guam the right of "first



refusal of declared excess lands” by the federal government, the most important segment of the bill. The Guam Delegate hoped to develop a process for acquiring excess land that would differ from the standard practice, which gave federal agencies interested in obtaining the unused property priority over the local government.¹⁸ Labeling the topic “one of the most contentious issues in Guam history since the end of World War II,” Underwood guided his bill through the House. It became law in 2000.¹⁹

Following the lead of his predecessors Antonio Borja Won Pat and Ben Garrido Blaz, Underwood drew attention to the hardships Guamanians endured during World War II. During Japan’s three-year occupation, the people of Guam suffered forced labor and internment. Although he was born a few years after the war ended, Underwood had a personal connection to the period; his two older siblings died as infants during the occupation. Reflecting on his parents’ reaction to their loss, Underwood said, “They taught me that in the midst of difficult circumstances, we should learn lessons about dignity and courage and not bitterness or resentment.”²⁰ Inspired by the Chamorros’ strength, Underwood focused his legislative energy on reparations for the victims of the occupation. During the 107th Congress (2001–2003), he oversaw the passage of the Guam War Claims Review Commission Act. The bill, which became law in 2002, established a commission to oversee and settle claims made by Guamanians after World War II. Although the law did not authorize any payments, it was viewed as an important step in the eventual monetary compensation of the victims of the war.²¹ In the interest of his constituents’ safety, Underwood also asked American military personnel to search for unexploded mustard gas bombs left in Guam during World War II.²²

Underwood’s goal of ensuring fair treatment for all Americans often extended to other U.S. territories. In 1996 he inserted language into a telecommunications bill that would extend domestic rates and access to new technology to Guam and other Pacific territories.²³ He also introduced legislation to extend federal benefits for low-income and older U.S. citizens and those with disabilities

to qualifying residents of Guam and the Virgin Islands. As a lifelong educator, Underwood wanted U.S. territories included in national education policy, and he expressed frustration when Guam, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands were omitted from President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind proposal.²⁴ “We will not be ignored and we will be included so that every child, whether they are from California, Texas or more familiar locations like Guam will not be left behind,” Underwood said.²⁵ Although he was able to secure more federal money to build schools and train teachers, Underwood was not satisfied with federal funding for public education in Guam.²⁶

Underwood also fought to preserve Guam’s unique cultural identity. He had chaired the Chamorro Language Commission before coming to Congress and had led a movement to incorporate the Chamorro language and culture into the curriculum at the University of Guam.²⁷ His commitment to protect Guam’s indigenous customs and traditions continued during his House tenure. In 2001 Underwood achieved an important victory when he convinced the Food and Drug Administration to allow the importation of betel nuts into the U.S. mainland. Chewed by many Pacific Islanders, the betel nut, a product of the areca palm tree, is a significant part of the Chamorro culture.²⁸ In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Underwood introduced a bill to establish a standard time zone for Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. Signed into law in 2000, the new legislation “will prove to be a source of pride when people refer to our time zone as Chamorro Standard Time,” Underwood remarked.²⁹ Rather than criticizing legislation that would declare English the official language of the U.S. government, Underwood sent House Members a “Dear Colleague” letter poking fun at the bill by offering a mock “ketchup-only” measure. “I was surprised to learn salsa has replaced ketchup in sales as our nation’s leading condiment,” Underwood wrote. “I hope you share my concern that a country built on ketchup should take steps to ensure the predominance of this vegetable as our national condiment.”³⁰ Speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 2000, Underwood



highlighted the unique nature of Guam and the other Pacific Islands, concluding his speech in Chamorro as a tribute to his native land.³¹

In 2002 Underwood announced his decision to not seek a sixth term in the House. “Ten years in Washington is a long time, and I had hoped to have a good career in Congress, and I felt that I’ve done well, but it’s also time to come back home,” Underwood remarked.³² Still interested in public service, he entered the race for governor of Guam in 2002. In the campaign against Guam senator Felix Camacho, Underwood, heavily outspent by his Republican opponent, employed a grassroots strategy like the one he used when he ran for Delegate.³³ Underwood lost the election, garnering 45 percent of the vote to Camacho’s 55 percent.³⁴ “This is not the end. It is just another chapter,” he told his supporters after the loss.³⁵ But four years later he again lost to Camacho. Named professor emeritus by the University of Guam in 2000, Underwood was selected as the university’s president in 2008.

NOTES

- 1 Jennifer Yachnin, “Guam Delegate Hopes to Exchange Long Flights for Governorship,” 26 September 2002, *Roll Call*: 14.
- 2 “Underwood & Ada for Governor and Lt. Governor,” accessed 7 November 2002, <http://www.underwoodada.com/?ua=profiles> (site discontinued).
- 3 Yachnin, “Guam Delegate Hopes to Exchange Long Flights for Governorship.”
- 4 Underwood’s *curriculum vitae* was posted on the University of Guam’s website, accessed 11 January 2012, <http://www.uog.edu/dynamicdata/PresidentsOffice.aspx> (site discontinued).
- 5 “Robert Underwood,” 2 November 1992, *Pacific Daily News* (Guam): 3.
- 6 Underwood’s campaign materials underscored his familiarity with important issues in Guam and his desire to bring change to the island. See “The Time Is Right for a Change,” 4 November 1992, *Pacific Daily News* (Guam): 27.
- 7 Robert F. Rogers, *Destiny’s Landfall: A History of Guam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011): 267.
- 8 Marshall Santos, “Democrats Win 2–1 Advantage,” 9 November 1992, *Pacific Daily News* (Guam): 3.
- 9 Tamba A. Bryant, “Guam Dems: Clinton Win Would Help Underwood,” 4 November 1992, *Pacific Daily News* (Guam): 3; Frale Oyen, “Election Postponed,” 3 November 1992, *Pacific Daily News* (Guam): 1.
- 10 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
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David Wu

1955–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1999–2011

DEMOCRAT FROM OREGON

David Wu, who immigrated to America in the 1960s, had never held political office before he won a seat representing the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1998. Described by one journalist as “an energetic fusion of gabby extrovert and musing intellectual,” Wu pursued an ambitious agenda during his House career and was not afraid to break with Democrats or businesses in his district on hot-button issues.¹ “We have a certain bandwidth,” Wu said of Congress’s capacity to juggle multiple issues. “Education has always been a top priority. Human rights is a particular passion of mine. There hasn’t been a lot of legislation in Congress on that,” he said in 2008. “I’ve been outspoken. Health care and energy are things that are very, very important to Oregon and the district.”²

David Wu was born on April 8, 1955, on the island of Taiwan off the coast of mainland China. When he was only an infant, his father, Keh Chang (K. C.) Wu left to study in New York, leaving Wu, his mother Helen, and his sisters back home. In 1961 Wu and the rest of his family immigrated to America, reunited with his father, and settled in southern California after K. C. took a job with a defense contractor.³ Wu learned to speak English in the first grade and was quickly drawn to classes in science, math, and technology.⁴ In 1977 he graduated from Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, with a degree in biology before beginning medical school at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While training to become a doctor, however, Wu realized that he found policy more interesting than medicine.⁵ He left Harvard for Yale Law School, earning a JD in 1982.

Wu settled in Portland in his late 20s and, after clerking for a federal judge on the Ninth Circuit, began a successful career as a lawyer for the region’s technology companies.⁶ He was active in his community, serving on

Portland’s planning commission for three years in the late 1980s, occasionally writing op-eds for his local paper and leading the drive to make Suzhou, China, Portland’s sister city. Wu had worked on Jimmy Carter’s and then Gary Hart’s presidential campaigns, but in Portland his political activities generally took place behind the scenes.⁷ Wu’s first marriage ended in divorce in 1992. He married his second wife, Michelle Maxine Wu, about four years later. They separated in late 2009 and later filed for divorce. Together they have a son and a daughter.⁸

During the 105th Congress (1997–1999), three-term Democratic Representative Elizabeth Furse decided not to run for re-election, opening a seat from Oregon’s 1st District, which encompassed downtown Portland and stretched northwesterly toward the coast and included all of Clatsop, Columbia, Washington, and Yamhill Counties as well as parts of Multnomah and Clackamas Counties.⁹ The area was home to a number of major technology companies, earning northwestern Oregon the nickname of “Silicon Forest,” a riff on California’s famed Silicon Valley.¹⁰

Despite having little political experience, Wu declared his candidacy for the House in the summer of 1997.¹¹ Although he knew the tech sector inside and out, Wu’s main campaign theme became access to universal education.¹² He wanted to pump federal money into the nation’s Head Start preschools, hire 100,000 new public school teachers, invest in research and job training, and make college more affordable with federal grants.¹³ He supported gun control, wanted to see Congress reinforce Social Security, and lauded efforts in Oregon to protect migratory salmon populations.¹⁴

His main opponent in the party’s primary was Linda Peters, chairwoman of the Washington County board of commissioners, who drew early funds from national groups, forcing Wu to lend his campaign money from





his personal savings.¹⁵ Peters then missed the deadline to appear in the statewide Oregon voters' guide, and on May 3, 1998, Wu picked up a major endorsement from the *Oregonian* newspaper. "Peters has the resume," the editors wrote, "but Wu has the chops. He displays the sharp intellect and grasp of detail that the job demands, and he exudes the passion and energy that the voters deserve. He's simply a better fit for the future of this diverse, evolving district."¹⁶ Wu defeated Peters with about 53 percent of the vote.¹⁷

With the open seat, the 1st District's general election quickly garnered national attention.¹⁸ Wu's main opponent was Molly Bordonaro, a young Republican from Portland's wealthy western suburbs who also had never held public office.¹⁹ Just as he did during the primary election, Wu touted his educational reforms as the lynchpin of his campaign.²⁰ By August, the local Portland paper called the contest in the 1st District "the hottest congressional race in the state."²¹

Wu received campaign help from House Democrats and, by mid-September, he had taken the lead in the polls.²² On the eve of the election, the press asked Wu what he envisioned for Portland's future. "I'd like to see a 21st century where all children start life well taken care of," he said, emphasizing the importance of early education. "I would like to see, in my lifetime, the final triumph of democracy around the world, everywhere, people being able to ... enjoy the human rights that we sometimes take for granted in this country."²³

On Election Day, Wu won in a nail-biter, taking 50 percent of the vote. His 1998 victory was the closest in his career. Over the next decade, Wu never won with less than 55 percent of the electorate. In 2008, riding the wave of Democratic excitement at Barack Obama's presidential candidacy, Wu captured nearly 72 percent, his largest margin of victory.²⁴

In his first term, Democrats assigned Wu to committees where he would spend his entire House career, the Committee on Education and the Workforce (later renamed the Committee on Education and Labor), and the Committee on Science (later renamed the Committee

on Science and Technology, then renamed again as the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology). Combined, the two committees perfectly fit his legislative agenda. "I see myself in a sweet spot, in a really, really sweet spot," he told the *Oregonian* a decade after receiving his initial assignments. "It's a sweet spot because it's economic growth. It's jobs."²⁵ During the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Wu also served a brief stint on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Outside of his immediate committee jurisdiction, Wu joined the New Democrat Coalition, and in the 107th Congress (2001–2003), he served as chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.²⁶

In the House, it did not take Wu long before he made headlines for a controversial decision to oppose a trade deal with China that companies in his district, including juggernauts Nike and Intel, supported.²⁷ For years, Congress had refused to grant China permanent most favored nation (MFN) status (later called permanent normal trade relations) because the federal government claimed China had committed human rights violations against its citizens. MFN status carried with it generous trade terms, making it a huge economic boost.²⁸ Because of certain loopholes, however, China had enjoyed MFN benefits for years and, by the 1990s, had become one of America's main trading partners.²⁹

For Wu, who had spent his earliest years in the shadow of Beijing, the human rights situation in China struck a chord.³⁰ He had opposed MFN status for China for almost a decade and, in 1991, said it would be "an act of political cowardice" if the United States relaxed trade restrictions before China improved its human rights record.³¹

As a corporate lawyer, Wu had once called himself "a foot soldier of capitalism," but he also believed "that the marketplace must be leavened by" a general sense of decency, that the United States had a moral obligation to use its purchasing power to spur democratic reform.³² "I believe in engagement. I believe in trade. We're not going to shut it down, but we have to do everything we can to help create some breathing space for progressive forces within China."³³



“He’s a key vote in a lot of ways,” one of Nike’s lobbyists said in the spring of 2000. “There’s a lot of attention on Mr. Wu right now.” Such a spotlight was rare for a freshman legislator, but Wu worked closely with the Democratic Whip’s office to generate opposition to the measure.³⁴ Nevertheless, the China trade bill passed in a bipartisan vote.³⁵ It was not the last time Wu bucked powerful interests back home either. In 2005 Wu emerged as the only member of the Oregon delegation to oppose the construction of a casino in the Columbia River Gorge, protesting the possible environmental impact on the area.³⁶

Nor was Wu afraid to cross party leaders on controversial votes. In 2003, for instance, Wu voted for a Republican bill to expand the country’s Medicare program. Democrats decried the proposal for threatening the stability of the program, and throughout the vote Wu sat stoically as Members buzzed around him. According to the *Washington Post*, a rotating cast of Democrats lobbied him, but Wu stayed silent until the final seconds when he voted yes after enough Republicans had switched their votes to pass the measure.³⁷ Wu was one of just 16 Democrats to vote for the bill, and he shocked some constituents back home. “In my view,” Wu told the *Oregonian* after the vote, “I delivered to my constituents and my conscience the right thing to do.”³⁸

Wu also pursued a number of local projects for his district. In 2002, for instance, he introduced the Fort Clatsop National Memorial Expansion Act, authorizing the Interior Department to buy land adjacent to the existing national memorial—the location where Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had wintered during their western expedition—in order to create a trail system linking the memorial to the Pacific Ocean.³⁹ President George W. Bush signed it into law on August 21, 2002. Two years later Wu helped direct tens of millions in federal funding to companies in Oregon that were developing safety equipment for the U.S. military, and he also helped procure \$15 million to dredge the shipping canal in the Columbia River.⁴⁰

For Wu, serving on the Education Committee was deeply personal, and he credited the educational

opportunities he had as a child for the success he experienced as an adult. “Education was my way up in the world,” he said during his first campaign in 1998. “To me this is not the issue du jour. This is my life.”⁴¹ Wu served on multiple subcommittees: Employer-Employee Relations (106th Congress [1999–2001] and 108th through 109th Congresses [2003–2007]); Early Childhood, Youth and Families (106th Congress); 21st Century Competitiveness (107th through 109th Congresses); Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness (110th and 111th Congresses [2007–2011]); and Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions (110th and 111th Congresses).

In his first few terms, Wu introduced a number of educational initiatives, but he found limited success. His bills included proposals to reduce class size, to improve classroom technology, to create new work-study programs, and to open funding for colleges and universities “serving Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.” He also worked to simplify the process of transferring from two-year to four-year universities. His efforts to reform certain types of student loans and their tax requirements attracted a good deal of support, and he recruited 85 cosponsors for his Student Loan Fairness Act of 2005. “Making it harder for students to go to college not only undercuts our promise to individuals, it undermines America’s economy and world leadership,” he said in 2006.⁴²

When Democrats retook the House in the 110th and 111th Congresses, Wu continued pushing the issues. He worked to expand visa quotas for immigrant employees with advanced degrees who worked for companies that funded college scholarships, and after a flood ravaged the town of Vernonia, Oregon, in 2007, Wu petitioned the Appropriations Committee in 2008 to help the school district buy new technology.⁴³ He also sought to improve the education and training opportunities available to military veterans living in rural areas.

Along with the Education Committee, the Science Committee was something of a natural home for Wu. Although he had hoped for a seat on the Judiciary Committee to work on intellectual property law, Wu settled into a number of Science subcommittees: Space



and Aeronautics (106th through 111th Congresses [1999–2011]); Technology (106th Congress); Energy (107th and 108th Congresses [2001–2005]); and Environment, Technology, and Standards (109th Congress [2005–2007]). When the Democrats regained the majority following the 2006 elections, Wu was named chairman of the Science Committee's Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation for both the 110th and 111th Congresses, where he worked to both strengthen federal initiatives helping startup technology firms and to improve math and science education.⁴⁴

Wu notched an early legislative victory in the 110th Congress when he introduced the Technology Innovation and Manufacturing Stimulation Act of 2007 (H.R. 1868) on February 15, 2007. The bill funded the National Institute of Standards and Technology for two years and created a number of new research and development programs at the 106-year-old organization. Wu's subcommittee considered the bill two months later and, after amending it twice, passed it by voice vote. Once the measure cleared the full committee on April 30, the House approved it four days later, 385 to 23. Although the Senate never considered it, H.R. 1868 became law after the House attached it to the America COMPETES Act, which President Bush signed into law in early August 2007.⁴⁵

That summer Wu won another legislative battle when the Science and Technology Committee approved his amendment to the Solar Energy and Advancement Act, clarifying language in the bill that made community colleges eligible to receive federal grants for training programs in solar power. Although the House never took up the bill, sections of it, including Wu's amendment, were wrapped up in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.⁴⁶

As subcommittee chairman in the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Wu wanted to leverage government resources to ignite innovation. "It meshes every priority I can think of. It meshes with everything I've been doing," Wu said, noting the support from Democratic leaders. "The speaker [Nancy Pelosi] is really hip to innovation," he pointed out. And the Obama administration, he said, also "really gets it in terms of innovation."⁴⁷

As chairman of the Technology and Innovation Subcommittee in the 111th Congress, Wu used his seat to help better prepare the country to deal with natural disasters, holding hearings on earthquakes, hurricanes, and wildfires. In an effort to coordinate the federal agencies that helped predict and respond to natural disasters, his bill, the Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2010, passed the House in a landslide vote, 335 to 50, on March 2, 2010.⁴⁸ Unfortunately for Wu, the Senate never considered it.

In addition to natural disasters, Wu's subcommittee conducted hearings on a multitude of different subjects from 2007 to 2011, including the effect of globalization on domestic innovation, federal initiatives for small design and tech firms, the commercial ramifications of federal research, federal cybersecurity policy, the development and regulation of new medicine, airline security technology, environmentally sensitive construction technologies, and improvements to America's energy grid.⁴⁹

Following an accusation that the press described as "an unwanted sexual encounter ... with a young California woman," Wu resigned from the House on August 3, 2011. He had initially decided not to stand for re-election in 2012, but after pressure from Democratic leadership and in the face of a looming ethics investigation, Wu stepped down.⁵⁰

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Library of Congress, Asian Division (Washington, DC). *Oral History*: 2003–2011, 8 linear feet. The collection contains videocassettes, DVDs, photographs, and documents related to an oral history project conducted by the United States Capitol Historical Society to document the service of Asian Americans in Congress. David Wu is included among the interviewees.

NOTES

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“I WOULD LIKE TO SEE,
IN MY LIFETIME, THE FINAL
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AROUND THE WORLD,
EVERYWHERE, PEOPLE BEING
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RIGHTS THAT WE SOMETIMES
TAKE FOR GRANTED
IN THIS COUNTRY.”

David Wu
Sunday Oregonian, October 4, 1998

Mike Honda

1941–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2001–2017

DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Over the course of his 16-year career in Congress, the affable Mike Honda quietly attained positions of authority in the House Democratic Caucus, serving on the party's Steering and Policy Committee and rising to a seat on the House Appropriations Committee. An advocate of tolerant and inclusive policies, Honda led the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and helped found the LGBT Equality Caucus. According to a political scientist based in Honda's hometown of San Jose, Honda "really puts the K in 'Kumbaya.'"¹

Mike Honda was born on June 27, 1941, in Walnut Grove, California. His parents, Giichi (Byron) and Fusako Honda, worked on farms in the Bay Area. When Honda was six months old, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration incarcerated thousands of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Honda's family was among 7,000 individuals sent to the Granada War Relocation Center in Colorado.² Honda remained imprisoned even after his father joined the U.S. Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in 1943 to teach Japanese to American servicemen. Nearly 70 years later, the elder Honda and the MIS received a Congressional Gold Medal for their service during the war.³

After the war, the family returned to the Bay Area and settled in San Jose. Mike Honda graduated from San Jose High School in 1959 and served with the Peace Corps in El Salvador from 1965 to 1967. He graduated in 1968 from San Jose State University with a bachelor's degree.⁴ Honda married Jeanne Yoshida in 1967, and they had two children, Mark and Michelle. A longtime educator, Jeanne died in 2004 after battling cancer.⁵

Honda worked as a teacher and principal in San Jose throughout the 1970s and 1980s, while earning a master's degree from his alma mater in 1974. In 1971 Honda

joined the San Jose planning commission and served for a decade.⁶ Honda then served on the San Jose school board for the next nine years (1981–1990) before winning election to the Santa Clara county board of supervisors. In 1996 Honda was elected to the California state assembly, representing San Jose.⁷

In December 1999, after his local Congressman Thomas Campbell opted to run for the Senate, Honda declared his candidacy for the open House seat. Both the national Democratic Party and President William J. (Bill) Clinton offered support.⁸ After winning the party nomination, Honda—whose campaign platforms included more funding for America's school systems, improved civil rights protections, and open trade with China—faced off against Republican Jim Cunneen in the general election. Honda won with 54 percent of the vote. For much of his career, Honda won re-election by overwhelming majorities, often taking upwards of 70 percent of the vote.⁹

Centered in Santa Clara County, California's 15th District encompassed parts of Silicon Valley, Santa Clara, and San Jose. Although redistricting shifted its boundaries and renumbered it the 17th District, high-tech manufacturing and computer science continued to dominate the local economy. The district had the highest concentration of Asian residents anywhere in mainland America.¹⁰

In the House, Honda served on several different committees: Budget (107th Congress [2001–2003] and 112th Congress [2011–2013]); Science (107th through 109th Congresses [2001–2007]); and Transportation and Infrastructure (107th through 109th Congresses [2001–2007]). Starting with the 110th Congress (2007–2009), when Democrats regained the majority, Honda served on the powerful Appropriations Committee for the balance of his career.¹¹ In the 112th Congress, Democrats named him Ranking Member of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee.





In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), he served as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies.

Honda used his committee assignments to pursue the interests of his tech-savvy district and fought for improved support for nanotechnology.¹² But with new technology came new security gaps, so Honda pressed for more funding to protect individual identities and guard America's computer grid, including the Cyber Security Research and Development Act.¹³

The former teacher also focused on educational opportunities. Honda led the creation of the National Commission on Educational Equity and Excellence to make recommendations for improving education access to the U.S. Department of Education.

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Honda recalled Japanese-American internment and warned against renewed racial profiling.¹⁴ In 2002 he voted against the authorization for the use of military force against Iraq and later worked to improve security at the U.S. Capitol.¹⁵

As a leader in the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Honda disagreed with President Barack Obama's administration on its combat policy in Afghanistan and later chaired the Progressive Caucus's Budget Task Force.¹⁶

Honda overcame an early fear of public speaking by singing karaoke, and he continued to sing in Washington. "It is a great leveler," he said. "Everyone makes themselves vulnerable."¹⁷ On the Hill he developed a reputation as a coalition builder, serving as the chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, where he worked on immigration policy. Honda championed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights while in Congress. He created the Anti-Bullying Caucus and the Transgender Equality Task Force in his fight to protect those who faced discrimination, such as his transgender grandchild. He also helped found the LGBT Equality Caucus.¹⁸

But changes back home to both California's primary system and to the makeup of Honda's constituency combined to make him electorally vulnerable. Numerous young Democrats in the Bay Area had become restive over the lack of turnover among an aging group of leaders. In

2011 the state of California replaced its closed primary system with a nonpartisan open primary that pitted the top two contenders against each other in the fall, regardless of party affiliation. In 2012 a young Democrat, Eric Swalwell, defeated longtime Democratic Representative Pete Stark under these new rules.¹⁹

During this time, Honda's district had become increasingly diverse. The Asian-Indian and Filipino-American population in the district had quadrupled, and the Chinese- and Vietnamese-American population had tripled. "Asian-American politics is a lot different than other ethno-American politics," Professor Melissa Michelson of Menlo College said. "It's a much weaker pan-ethnicity because there are so many different languages, different religions." Honda, in his early 70s, now faced a challenge from a younger Asian-Indian Democrat, Ro Khanna.²⁰ Khanna had worked in President Obama's Commerce Department from 2009 to 2011 and was the highest-ranking Asian Indian American in the U.S. government.²¹

Honda won the June 3, 2014, primary with 49 percent of the vote (Khanna took 27 percent), but because neither candidate captured a majority, the two faced off again in the general election that November. Election forecasters expected Khanna to pick up both Republican votes and support from the other Democratic candidates.²² In late September, the Khanna campaign filed a complaint with the House Ethics Committee against Honda for using his official staff for campaign purposes.²³ Nevertheless, Honda won re-election in a close race that was not decided until the Friday morning after Election Day.²⁴

When Honda announced his candidacy for re-election in June 2015, Khanna had already made it clear that he intended to challenge Honda again.²⁵ In late July, however, the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct announced that it would look into the 2014 complaint made by Khanna because of findings made by the Office of Congressional Ethics, its independent investigatory arm.²⁶ After edging out Honda in the June 2016 primary, Khanna beat Honda in the fall general election with 61 percent of the vote.²⁷



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OVER THE COURSE OF HIS
16-YEAR CAREER IN
CONGRESS, THE AFFABLE
MIKE HONDA
QUIETLY ATTAINED POSITIONS
OF AUTHORITY IN THE HOUSE
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS... .
AN ADVOCATE OF
TOLERANT AND INCLUSIVE
POLICIES, HONDA LED
THE CONGRESSIONAL
PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS AND
THE CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN
PACIFIC AMERICAN CAUCUS
AND HELPED FOUND THE
LGBT EQUALITY CAUCUS.

Bobby Jindal

1971–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2005–2008
REPUBLICAN FROM LOUISIANA

Bobby Jindal was a fast-rising, intelligent “wunderkind technocrat” in the Republican Party when he won election to a U.S. House seat representing a district outside New Orleans in 2004, becoming the second Indian American elected to the House.¹ The gulf region’s response to and recovery from a crippling 2005 hurricane season defined Jindal’s House career and eventually catapulted him to the Louisiana governor’s mansion. The son of Indian immigrants seeking higher educational opportunities, Jindal became a rallying point for the Indian-American community. “What makes the American system so successful is the fact that immigrants and their children born here can get ahead,” he declared upon his first election to the House. “[They] can do very well, just do hard work.”²

Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on June 10, 1971, Piyush Jindal was the son of Indian immigrants from the Punjab region of northern India. Jindal later insisted on being called “Bobby” after the youngest son in the television show *The Brady Bunch*. His parents had come to the United States so his mother, Raj Gupta Jindal, could pursue graduate work in nuclear physics at Louisiana State University.³ His father, Amar, was an engineer—the only one of nine siblings to finish high school. Bobby Jindal has a younger brother, Nikesh.⁴

Jindal graduated from Baton Rouge High School in 1988 before earning degrees in biology and public policy from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1991. Jindal was named a Rhodes scholar and studied at Oxford University, earning a master of letters in 1994. Jindal worked briefly for a consulting firm after graduation before taking on the position of president of the University of Louisiana school system in 1999. Bobby Jindal married chemical engineer Supriya Jolly, and they have three children: Selia, Shaan, and Slade.⁵

Jindal’s interest in politics came early. During college, he interned in Louisiana Representative Jim McCrery’s office. The eager Jindal personally asked McCrery what he could do to contribute to the Congressman’s policy initiatives and McCrery shuttled him off to do research on Medicare. Two weeks later, Jindal delivered a thick report that impressed his boss.⁶

Jindal was preparing to attend Harvard Medical School when he was offered a secretary position in the Louisiana cabinet, heading the Department of Health and Hospitals. Jindal served for two years, never pursuing medical training. Thereafter, public service became his calling. “After my daughter was born, I really started thinking about the fact that I wanted her to grow up here in Louisiana like I did,” Jindal recalled. “I realized so many of my friends were leaving home, and I wanted to be a part of turning that around.”⁷ Jindal served as executive director of the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare in 1998. In 2001 President George W. Bush appointed him Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Jindal’s first attempt at elected office came when he ran for Louisiana governor in 2003, losing narrowly to Democrat Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, 52 percent to 48 percent. A year later, when Louisiana Representative David Vitter vacated his House seat to run for the U.S. Senate, Jindal launched a campaign for the congressional seat. The district stretched from east of New Orleans, north across Lake Pontchartrain to the Mississippi border. Made up of primarily white-collar conservatives in the fast-growing New Orleans commuter suburbs, the constituency was 80 percent white.⁸ Jindal capitalized on the notoriety he gained in his close gubernatorial loss. “When God closes one door, he opens another,” he said to a crowd of GOP





supporters when he announced his candidacy in January 2004. “I understand there’s a job opening here.”⁹ Jindal did not live in the district before running, but his popularity catapulted him to front-runner status.¹⁰ In August, his nearest competitor, then state representative (and future U.S. House Majority Whip) Steve Scalise, withdrew from the race ostensibly because Jindal’s popularity and funding made him a clear favorite. Some observers were already calling Jindal “Congressman.”¹¹ Jindal raised more money than needed, contributing the excess to other GOP campaigns.¹² He won the general election with a comfortable 78 percent.¹³

Jindal was the first Indian American to win election since the first Asian-American Representative, Dalip Singh (Judge) Saund of California, left office in 1963. But Jindal tended to play down his heritage. “We’ll be eating a lot of turkey over the holidays—with some crawfish on the side,” Jindal told reporters after his election. “(Louisiana) is the life we know. This is our culture. This is our home.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, Jindal recognized the significance of being the son of immigrants in Congress. “I am very, very honored by the well wishes and support from the Indian American community. I guess the reason I ran for office in the first place is that I saw my parents [*sic*] experience in this country,” he told an Indian-American newspaper. “I want to make sure that the opportunities that brought our parents here in the first place continue to exist for the second, third and fourth generations as well.”¹⁵

An effective and prolific fundraiser, Jindal amassed a campaign re-election war chest as a freshman Member that matched those of congressional veterans.¹⁶ He won re-election easily in 2006 with 88 percent of the vote.¹⁷ Jindal initially requested seats on the Energy and Commerce or Ways and Means Committees when he arrived in Congress. He did not receive a seat on either panel, as freshmen rarely get such plum assignments. He instead served on the Education and the Workforce, Homeland Security, and Resources Committees in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he left Education and the Workforce and remained on the other two panels until he left the House mid-Congress in 2008.

Natural disaster defined Jindal’s House career after Hurricane Katrina struck southern Louisiana on August 29, 2005, just nine months after he came to Congress. The powerful storm surge overwhelmed New Orleans’s levee system resulting in 15- to 20-foot floods which left 80 percent of the city under water.¹⁸ At the time, Katrina was the costliest hurricane in U.S. history and one of the five deadliest, and it was followed less than a month later by Hurricane Rita, prompting large-scale evacuations of already storm-damaged areas. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, nearly two-thirds of the bills Jindal submitted over the next 18 months were related to the storms, their aftermath, and other natural disasters.¹⁹

Jindal’s first act fell in line with his conservative beliefs. He initially teamed with Senator Vitter to author a law banning local municipalities from confiscating guns from citizens during natural disasters. This followed New Orleans’s confiscation of 700 weapons in the storm’s chaotic aftermath. The city returned the weapons in April 2006 after the National Rifle Association (NRA) threatened a lawsuit.

Jindal introduced the Hurricane Regulatory Relief Act on October 6, 2005; he immediately gained the support of Education and Workforce Committee Chairman (and soon-to-be Republican Leader) John Boehner of Ohio. The bill was aimed at streamlining aid to students, teachers, and displaced workers. It adjusted financial aid awards to students whose circumstances changed because of the storms, allowed teachers credentialed in Louisiana to find employment in the state in which they resided, and allowed affected states to allocate funding to emergency loans and early retirement distributions to displaced workers.²⁰

Jindal was frustrated with the pace of government assistance, citing rules and regulations as the source of the delays. “People are starting to come home and businesses are beginning to reopen, critical infrastructure is slowly being rebuilt and we need to facilitate this recovery by ensuring that the state, local and federal governments are made completely user friendly,” Jindal told his colleagues. He emphasized that his bill did not create greater



bureaucracy: “Too often government proves its existence by adding rules and regulations, which can turn the rebuilding process into a vast quicksand, holding back growth. This is a perfect time to clean our regulatory house and make sure Louisiana is a welcoming, supportive state in which to live and work.”²¹ Jindal also introduced legislation that created the Louisiana Hurricane and Flood Protection Council, a group charged with overseeing the Army Corps of Engineers in their efforts over the next 20 years to bolster infrastructure against damaging natural disasters.²²

Post-storm difficulty in Jindal’s district shifted his traditionally pro-business stance when he fought against insurance companies dropping policies and raising premiums in Katrina’s wake. Jindal supported Democratic legislation that compelled insurance companies to share their data on losses, and he requested that the federal flood insurance program be able to borrow additional funds to cover homeowners’ losses.²³ Jindal worked with then Florida Governor Charlie Crist—whose state had faced a damaging 2004 hurricane season—to brainstorm ideas on how to reform the insurance industry in areas at high risk for hurricanes. Jindal showcased the Homeowners’ Defense Act of 2007, sponsored by Florida Representatives that had recently passed the House, as an example of good federal involvement with the insurance industry. The legislation allowed state-sponsored insurance funds to pool catastrophic risk and created a fund for low-interest loans to homeowners affected by natural disasters.²⁴

Jindal criticized the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), charged with aiding the immediate aftermath and long-term recovery from the storm. In March 2006, he announced the allocation of more than \$79 million in FEMA grants to parishes in his district.²⁵ In April 2006, Jindal hosted the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee for a field hearing at the Louisiana supreme court building in New Orleans. The hearing focused on FEMA waste, fraud, and abuse.²⁶ Jindal was particularly critical of the high levels of formaldehyde found in FEMA trailers serving as temporary shelters for hurricane victims. (Tests revealed the presence of the poison exceeded Environmental

Protection Agency standards by 83 percent.)²⁷ He also faulted FEMA for hiring out-of-state contractors to clear debris, distribute supplies, and oversee reconstruction rather than award contracts to local Louisiana businesses.²⁸ Jindal’s work in disaster relief earned praise from across the political spectrum. A local Democratic sheriff noted that Louisianans were frequently disappointed with the government response “from top to bottom,” but that there were “some people who distinguished themselves, and Bobby Jindal was one of them.”²⁹

Jindal also sought increased oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, a potential boon to the southern Louisiana economy that had been crippled by the 2005 hurricanes. In his first term, Jindal helped to pass a law opening 8.3 million acres to drilling in the Gulf of Mexico—according to Jindal, this was the culmination of a long-term fight among Louisiana politicians spanning 50 years.³⁰ The House-passed bill, enacted as part of a larger tax and trade bill, split drilling revenues evenly between federal and gulf state governments.³¹

Jindal attempted to balance his drilling bill with certain environmental protections, including those benefiting gulf state fishing operations. He offered an amendment to a Department of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Act allocating \$2.5 million to combat “dead zones” in the Gulf of Mexico. In these areas, pollutants were causing algal blooms, which sucked oxygen out of water, making it unsustainable for sea life.³² With one eye on Louisiana’s fishing industry, Jindal opposed a request to put oysters on the endangered species list in November 2005—“This is a victory for common sense,” he said, when the requester withdrew his petition.³³ Citing its importance for protecting against hurricane storm surge, Jindal introduced legislation adding 3,000 acres to Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve—a series of six sites throughout the southern Louisiana peninsula.³⁴

On January 23, 2007, Jindal announced his intention to fulfill a past political ambition to run for Louisiana governor. He resigned from the House nearly a year later, on January 14, 2008, to focus on his gubernatorial campaign.³⁵ His victory in the governor’s race was embraced



by both the Indian-American community and Republican Party.³⁶ In 2009 the GOP selected Jindal for the high-profile role of delivering the response to Democratic President Barack Obama's first State of the Union Address. In 2015, after running in a crowded Republican primary field, he suspended his campaign for the GOP nomination for President.³⁷

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Steve Austria

1958–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2009–2013
REPUBLICAN FROM OHIO

Becoming just the second person of Filipino heritage to serve as a voting Representative in Congress, Steve Austria won election to the U.S. House of Representatives amid the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.¹ As a proponent of shrinking government services and spurring small business growth, Austria quickly worked his way onto the influential Appropriations Committee, where he could tend to the economy of his southwestern Ohio district. But when Ohio's congressional delegation shrank by two seats during reapportionment after the 2010 Census, Austria's House career ended abruptly.

Steve Austria was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on October 12, 1958, to Clement and Jean Brockman Austria. His father, a medical doctor, was born in the Philippines and fought alongside Filipino rebels and General Douglas MacArthur against Japanese forces during World War II. Clement later immigrated to the United States from Tiaong, Quezon, to the Cincinnati area, where he attended medical school; Jean Austria worked as a nurse.² By observing his father's work on the Greene County Central Committee of the Republican Party, Steve Austria became interested in politics and "realized that through public service I could have a positive impact on people's lives."³ The oldest of nine children, Austria grew up in Xenia, Ohio, a community about an hour's drive northeast of Cincinnati. In 1977 he graduated from Carroll High School in Riverside, Ohio, and in 1982 earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Austria worked for more than 15 years as a financial advisor. He married Eileen Crotty, whom he met in the 1980s while putting up campaign signs during an Ohio state senate election.⁴ The couple raised three sons: Brian, Kevin, and Eric.

When Austria embarked on his political career by succeeding his father on the GOP's Greene County

Central Committee, Clement Austria counseled him to campaign door-to-door to get to know voters. "My father was absolutely right. I never lost an election, and I credit that to my father's advice and all the time I spent in the district, listening to constituents," Steve Austria recalled years later.⁵ In 1998 he challenged incumbent Republican state representative Marilyn Reid in the GOP primary. Austria upended Reid, who was in the midst of an ethics scandal, and went on to win the general election. He served briefly in the Ohio state house of representatives from 1999 to 2000 before winning election to the state senate. Austria served in that chamber from 2001 to 2008, rising to the position of majority whip during his last three years there. He also chaired the judiciary and highways and transportation committees.⁶ His focus in both chambers was to crack down on crime. Austria authored bills to increase penalties for child rapists and for offenders who solicit sex with minors online; he also helped pass a bill that allowed Ohioans to carry concealed weapons.⁷

When nine-term incumbent U.S. Representative David L. Hobson announced his retirement from Congress, Austria joined the race for the vacant seat. The district, which was adjacent to Republican Leader John Boehner's Cincinnati-centered district, encompassed six counties (and parts of two others) in the southcentral portion of the state, from the Miami Valley region near Dayton to just south and east of Columbus. The district was a mixture of rural and residential areas, with industrial and agriculture businesses; it was also home to several military facilities, including Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the Springfield Air National Guard Base.

The Austrias had a long connection to Hobson, and one political almanac described Hobson as a political mentor to Steve. Eileen Austria was also a longtime staffer for Hobson going back to his time in the Ohio legislature





and later served as his congressional district director.⁸ As the favorite in the GOP primary, Austria defeated three opponents with 55 percent of the vote; his next closest competitor, Ron Hood, a former state representative, garnered 34 percent.⁹

In the 2008 general election, Austria faced attorney Sharen Swartz Neuhardt. Austria benefitted from the fact that the district was conservative-leaning; he also enjoyed a fundraising advantage of \$1.2 million to Neuhardt's \$900,000. However, the campaign was not without its challenges. A political blogger claimed that Austria plagiarized portions of columns he wrote for a local newspaper. Another paper, the *Dayton Daily News*, rendered an editorial judgment that "What he's most likely to do is to settle into a long, long career of keeping people back home happy, while remaining on the congressional back benches."¹⁰ But these bumps in the road were soon overshadowed by the revelation that for six years Neuhardt housed a Rwandan refugee who was not legally in the country.¹¹ Austria eventually pulled away with a comfortable, 58-percent majority of the vote on Election Day.¹² Afterward, as the economic crisis in the fall of 2008 deepened, he told the press, "The No. 1 issue we've got to get to work on is the economy. We've got to create new jobs and bring new businesses into the area. We've got to keep government spending under control, and I'm going to have a challenge in D.C. to do that."¹³ Austria became just the second person of Filipino heritage—behind Robert C. (Bobby) Scott of Virginia—to serve as a full voting Member of the House.¹⁴

In 2010 Austria won easy re-election to the House—cruising through his primary and winning the general election against Democrat William R. Conner 62 to 32 percent, with two other minor party candidates capturing the remainder of the vote.¹⁵ In that election, control of the majority swung to Republicans on a wave of discontent with President Barack Obama and the Affordable Care Act. "The American people have spoken loud and clear," Austria said after the election. "They are tired of Washington not listening to them and pushing through policies for the expansion of government and creating more spending. We

as Republicans are going to stop that and turn this country around. That all starts with helping the job creators."¹⁶

At the opening of his first term in 2009, Austria won assignments to the House Budget and Homeland Security Committees. Given that he was a member of the House minority, these were solid committee assignments. Moreover, fellow GOP freshmen named him president of their class.¹⁷

At the opening of the 112th Congress (2011–2013), after Republicans captured the House majority, Austria moved to the exclusive Appropriations Committee and gave up his prior assignments. On Appropriations, Austria held seats on three subcommittees: Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies; Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies; and State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs.

Recovering from the economic crisis and battling the federal deficit consumed Austria's legislative agenda. South Central Ohioans had elected him on a platform that called for shrinking the size of the federal government. *Politics in America* said he was not so much of a "conservative firebrand" as he was "a reliable Republican vote and a consistent critic of what he calls unsustainable budget deficits."¹⁸ Austria spoke on the floor on a number of occasions but usually in sharply messaged one-minute speeches or in colloquies. Invariably, these revolved around his fiscally conservative views. In a March 2009 colloquy on the economy, the economic stimulus, and carbon use cap-and-trade proposals, Austria said, "When you start combining, increasing taxes, when you start combining the debt that we are just continuing to increase, to try and tax and spend your way out of an economic crisis I don't believe is the right way to go. We can do better than that."¹⁹ In another colloquy a few weeks later, Austria advocated relief for families and small businesses through tax cuts, noting, the "Federal Government right now thinks that they can just spend all they want for as long as they want, just continue to borrow, and now they're going to start taxing families and all so that they can keep this feel-good spending going on. And I think the Americans, as they begin to realize what's going on here in D.C., are



becoming more and more outraged, and businesses are already very concerned on how they're going to be able to continue to survive."²⁰

In early 2009, in the first major vote of his career, he joined with his Republican colleagues who unanimously opposed a nearly \$800 billion economic stimulus bill (which the Democratic majority passed). His comments to the *Columbus Dispatch* at the time compared the stimulus bill to the Keynesian economics of the New Deal. He drew criticism for his claim that President Franklin D. Roosevelt "tried to borrow and spend, he tried to use the Keynesian approach, and our country ended up in a Great Depression. That's just history." He later withdrew the statement, insisting that he meant to convey the idea that Roosevelt, who was elected three years after the crisis began, implemented policies that did not help end the economic crisis.²¹ While Austria voted with his party on most major issues, he was one of several dozen Republicans to vote for an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP).

Like most freshman Members, Austria was attentive to his district. With his district's heavy military presence, he promoted it as a region that could help lead U.S. cybersecurity policy and the use of advanced security and military applications (such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles—UAVs) through partnerships among local universities and private businesses. He supported federal loan guarantees to help build a uranium enrichment plant in a neighboring district. In the 111th Congress, he introduced a bill that barred the use of funds to transfer enemy combatants from Guantanamo Bay to any facility in Ohio and advocated keeping the Guantanamo detention facility open. In the 112th Congress, as he had in the prior one, he authored the Health Savings and Affordability Act, which would have expanded health insurance deductions and health savings accounts. Referred to the Ways and Means Committee, the proposal received no major action. Austria also introduced the Colonel Charles Young Home Study Act to direct the Interior Department to conduct a study of the National Historic Landmark site in Xenia, Ohio, for possible inclusion in the National Park System. Young,

an African-American U.S. Army intelligence officer and commander in the Spanish-American War, helped lead the 1916 hunt for Pancho Villa in Mexico.²²

After the 2010 Census and resulting reapportionment, Ohio lost two of its 18 House seats. When the Ohio legislature drew up the new map, it dismantled Austria's district, throwing most of his constituency into a new district where Republican Mike Turner had the upper hand as a five-term House veteran. Austria faced the unpalatable options of taking on Turner or moving out of the new district into a neighboring one where he would challenge Republican Steve Stivers, a first-term incumbent but also a close ally of Speaker Boehner.²³ On December 29, 2011, Austria announced that he would retire from Congress rather than wage an uphill fight in a GOP primary that "pitted friends against friends."²⁴

His announcement spared the party a bruising primary. Nevertheless, Austria was unhappy with what he perceived to be an unfair process. "I have thoroughly enjoyed working on behalf of every one of my communities, both large and small, and regret that I will not be able to continue the work I have truly been committed to, due to the redrawing of the maps," Austria said. He also noted, "Since the redistricting process began, it has been done in secrecy and with closed door deals. I join my constituents, who are frustrated and disappointed about the new maps forced upon them and the fact that they didn't have a vote in the process."²⁵

During his farewell speech on the House Floor, Austria thanked his colleagues, staff, and family, noted his pride in his Asian-American heritage, and reflected on his House career and his future. "Often, as I walk through the Halls of the Capitol or am traveling throughout the district, folks will come up to me and remind me that, when one door closes, another opens and that God has a plan for us all."²⁶ After he left the House in 2013, Austria returned to Beavercreek, Ohio, where he founded a consulting firm. He also is a member of the Republican National Committee's Asian American Advisory Council.²⁷



NOTES

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“THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
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Steve Austria

Lancaster Eagle Gazette, November 3, 2010

Anh (Joseph) Cao

1967–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2009–2011

REPUBLICAN FROM LOUISIANA

Anh (Joseph) Cao, a refugee of the Vietnam War and one-time Jesuit seminarian, pulled off an improbable election victory to serve in the House of Representatives in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). Running as a Republican in a historically Democratic-leaning district, Cao (pronounced “gow”) dispatched a nine-term incumbent to represent much of the city of New Orleans. As the first Vietnamese American to serve in Congress, his win highlighted the new political activism of the Vietnamese community in post-Katrina New Orleans. Cao’s idealism, notion of service to the indigent, and willingness to cross party lines to support measures he felt best met the needs of his largely poor, minority constituency often put him at odds with his party’s leaders on health care and economic stimulus during the Great Recession. “I don’t want to conform to any ideology, to be put into a little corner,” Cao said shortly after his election.¹ A longtime political associate observed, “It’s hard to categorize him as a Republican or Democrat. In his heart, Anh is a Jesuit.”²

Anh (Joseph) Cao was born on March 13, 1967, in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam. Cao was the fifth of eight children. His father served as an officer in the South Vietnamese Army and was later imprisoned by North Vietnamese officials during the Vietnam War. At age eight, Cao immigrated to the United States with two siblings, older sister Thanh and younger brother Khanh. During the Fall of Saigon in 1975, as North Vietnamese troops overran South Vietnam’s capital, Cao’s mother took the three children to a nearby airfield and, while she remained behind, spirited them onto a military transport with their aunt. The younger brother lived in Guam with the aunt; the sister went to Florida to live with a foster family; and Anh lived for the first several years in the United States with an uncle in Goshen, Indiana, before

they relocated to Texas. Cao learned English from his elementary school classmates in Goshen.³ He graduated from Jersey Village High School in Jersey Village, Texas, in the northwestern suburbs of Houston. He earned a bachelor of science degree in physics from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, in 1990.

Cao’s Catholic faith had a profound influence on him as he came of age and later shaped his views on social policy. After college, he entered the seminary with the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuit order. His first assignment was at Grand Coteau, Louisiana, to begin training for the priesthood. For the next two years, the Jesuits sent Cao to Brownsville, Texas; Montgomery, Alabama; Tijuana, Mexico; and Hong Kong, China, to help the poor. To further his religious studies, he earned a master’s degree in philosophy from the Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York City in 1995. He was then sent to the Jesuit-founded Loyola University in New Orleans to study law.⁴

During his outreach to the poor, Cao had an experience that altered his path to the priesthood. “In life’s journey, you sometimes reach a level of uncertainty that you have to make such a leap,” he once explained. “I was working in extremely poor conditions, and I wanted to promote social change. I came to believe, over the course of two or three years, that the best way to do that would be to enter public office. It would also allow me to have a family—the celibate life can be quite lonely. So I drafted a course of action for myself to enter politics. But it was a quite painful discernment. It implied I would have to leave the seminary. I would have to start life over again. I would have to make that leap of faith.”⁵ In 1996 he left the Jesuits and, while reestablishing himself, lived with his sister Thanh in Northern Virginia. A year later, Cao returned to Loyola and earned his law degree in 2000. He worked as an immigration lawyer and personal injury lawyer. While





studying law, he met a pharmacy student, Hieu (Kate) Hoang, who had once been one of his catechism students at the local Catholic church. They married in 2001 and later had two daughters, Sophia and Betsy.

Cao's initial experience with politics came at the local level as a community advocate for the approximately 15,000 Vietnamese who lived in suburbs east of New Orleans. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina devastated the city and large swaths of southern Louisiana, flooded Cao's home, and left his neighborhood in tatters. Afterwards, many of the city's 460,000 residents fled. By some estimates, only 190,000 remained. But the Vietnamese community stayed virtually intact and rebuilt. The storm and its aftermath also forced that small community of fishermen and business owners to become, according to one observer, more vocal in asserting its interests.⁶

Cao's first run for political office was inspired when, in early 2006, the city announced plans to place a waste landfill in their community. Cao led the opposition and provided legal advice to fight the move. At one meeting between city residents and federal officials, Congressman Mike Honda of California, head of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, urged the Vietnamese community in New Orleans to become more politically active.⁷ In 2007 Cao heeded that call. The city scrapped its plan for the landfill because of the protests. That success propelled Cao to run for a seat in the Louisiana state house of representatives. With no organized support, he ran as an independent and finished fifth in a six-candidate field. The *Times-Picayune* later described it as an "inauspicious" political start.⁸ But Cao's effort won the notice of Bryan Wagner, a Republican and former city councilman in the 1980s—reportedly, the first to be elected to the council since Reconstruction. He persuaded Cao, a lifelong independent, to join the Republican Party.

In 2008 Cao challenged nine-term, Democrat incumbent William Jefferson. Jefferson, an Ivy League-trained lawyer, had been a force in local politics for two decades and was immensely popular with the city's majority black population in no small measure because he was the first African American ever to represent the city

and the first since Reconstruction to represent Louisiana in Congress.⁹ His district took in almost all of the city of New Orleans, including the French Quarter, sweeping out far to the east to encompass the less populous portions of Orleans Parish. It also swung across the Mississippi River to take in several West Bank towns and then west through Jefferson Parish and into portions of the towns of Metairie and Kenner, the largely white suburbs west of the city. The total population of the heavily Democratic district was 60 percent African American.

Recent scandals hobbled Jefferson's re-election bid. In 2006 the Federal Bureau of Investigation raided his House office and his home, where agents found more than \$90,000 in cash stuffed into his freezer, part of a larger amount of \$400,000 that the government claimed was bribe money from contractors seeking his help to secure federal government work in Africa. The Democratic Caucus stripped him of his seat on the Ways and Means Committee in May 2006, and a little more than a year later, the Justice Department indicted Jefferson on bribery charges.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he did not resign from the House and while his case worked its way through the courts, Jefferson eventually prevailed in a competitive 2008 Democratic primary.¹¹

Meanwhile, Cao ran a quiet campaign and won the Republican primary unopposed. His under-the-radar approach was strategic, he later recalled, meant to lull Democrats into a false sense of security. "We sat there and waited, we didn't do any hoopla," Cao noted. "We stayed low profile."¹² His areas of local focus were coastal restoration, levee protection, and redevelopment of New Orleans after Katrina. Education and health care policy were two other areas of interest for Cao.

After Jefferson won his primary, Cao's campaign went into high gear. "We started sprinting," Cao recalled, buying advertising time to highlight Cao's character and honesty and stressing the need for open government. Cao won the backing of several high-profile politicians and received a helping hand from Mother Nature. When Hurricane Gustav forced the postponement of the Louisiana primary elections in early September, it set the entire process back



a month. This separated the 2nd District election from the presidential election in early November, where the African-American Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, won by large margins on his way to his historic election as President, a trend which likely would have helped Jefferson in the House race.

As it was, Jefferson's campaign ran out of resources, and the postponement complicated his task by dampening voter turnout. Additionally, white Democrats largely repulsed by Jefferson's ethics problems either did not vote or defected to Cao. Turnout in the postponed general election on December 6, 2008, was light, with little more than 65,000 voters casting ballots. Cao carried the more conservative Jefferson Parish outside the city with 60 percent of the vote. Jefferson won Orleans Parish, but only with 51 percent. Just a month earlier in the presidential election, Obama won Orleans Parish with nearly 80 percent of the vote.¹³ Cao won the overall with 49.5 percent to Jefferson's 46.8 percent. Green Party and Progressive Party candidates split the remainder.¹⁴ Observers hailed it as the biggest upset of the 2008 election cycle and dubbed Cao the "dragon slayer."¹⁵

Cao's election also garnered headlines because it made him the first Vietnamese American ever to serve in Congress. At a post-election celebration, Cao told a crowd, "Never in my life did I think I could be a future congressman. The American dream is well and alive."¹⁶ A point of pride for Vietnamese Americans nationally, his victory also was touted by congressional Republicans as the future of their party. "As House Republicans look ahead to the next two years, the Cao victory is a symbol of what can be achieved when we think big, present a positive alternative, and work aggressively to earn the trust of the American people," House GOP Leader John Boehner of Ohio told his colleagues shortly after the election.¹⁷ He titled that memo to House Republicans "The Future is Cao."¹⁸

Others saw that future as being quite delimited, judging Cao's victory to be a one-off event: a Republican elected in an overwhelmingly Democratic district against a damaged, weakened opponent. Just the day after his election Cao was pegged as a "short-timer," an "aberration," a "one-term

wonder," and Democrats instantly targeted him for the next election cycle.¹⁹

Shortly after the opening of the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Cao won assignments to three committees that had direct bearing on his port city district: Homeland Security; Transportation and Infrastructure; and Oversight and Government Reform. Yet, despite the GOP's promotion of his historic election and his strong set of committee assignments, Cao was an uncertain ally for party leaders from the start. They may have claimed him as their future, but he soon proved to be a difficult vote, sometimes flirting with and at other times joining Democrats on some of the 111th Congress's landmark legislation.

In the wake of the 2008 recession, the first major bill considered by the Democratic-controlled Congress and backed vigorously by the White House was an economic stimulus bill widely seen as the public-focused companion to the large lifeline (Troubled Asset Relief Program) that Congress threw to the big financial institutions in the fall of 2008. Believing they had been cut out of the drafting process, House Republicans, led by GOP Whip Eric Cantor of Virginia, declared that no Republican would vote for the bill.

By the eve of the vote, Cao, ever watchful for federal money to help his district continue its Katrina recovery, was the lone Republican still offering his support. The White House, eager to say that the measure had bipartisan support, lobbied Cao intensely. He later recalled that White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel "insinuated" that Cao's vote might translate into re-election support. But on the day of the vote, when Cao realized that New Orleans would get only 20 percent of the average amount that other congressional districts would receive from the bill (\$330 million as opposed to \$1.7 billion), he joined every other Republican in voting no.²⁰

Philosophically, Cao also seemed to diverge from his party on one of the defining political issues of the decade. Whereas Republicans uniformly rejected a major health care reform law backed by Democrats, Cao believed such legislation was necessary and would benefit his constituents. "I listened to the countless stories of Orleans



and Jefferson parish citizens whose health care costs are exploding—if they are able to obtain health care at all,” Cao explained. “Louisianans need real options for primary care, for mental health care, and for expanded health care for seniors and children.”²¹ Years of tending to the poor and participating in the post-Katrina recovery in New Orleans informed that viewpoint, but Cao’s vigorous anti-abortion position also shaped his vision of health care reform. The caveat was that he would never support a bill which allowed federal money to be used to conduct abortions.

Political calculations weighed heavily on Cao, too. In August 2009, he candidly stated, “I know that voting against the health care bill will probably be the death of my political career, but I have to live with myself.” He later had to walk back that statement because supporters and donors perceived that he was throwing in the towel on his re-election chances.²² Moreover, Republican leaders placed intense pressure on him to maintain uniform GOP solidarity against the measure. With Whip Cantor at his side on the House Floor seeking to convince him to vote no, Cao nevertheless cast a yes vote and was the only Republican who voted for the bill that passed the House in the fall of 2009. Afterward he explained that he voted in the best interests of his constituents: “Today, I obtained a commitment from President Obama that he and I will work together to address the critical health care issues of Louisiana including the FMAP [Federal Medical Assistance Percentage] crisis and community disaster loan forgiveness, as well as issues related to Charity and Methodist Hospitals. And, I call on my constituents to support me as I work with him on these issues.... I have always said that I would put aside partisan wrangling to do the business of the people. My vote tonight was based on my priority of doing what is best for my constituents.”²³

Senate revisions to the health care bill eventually forced Cao to reconsider his support. While he applauded President Obama “for his strength and determination in pushing for health care reform in the face of great adversity,” he balked at the latest version of the bill that had removed Hyde Amendment language banning the use of federal dollars for abortions and also stripped

protections for medical providers who refused to assist in abortion procedures because of personal conscience. He called the changes “devastating in their effects” and pulled his support.²⁴

On the day before the vote, Cao expressed empathy with those priced out of the health care market, but stressed the moral imperatives that drove his opposition. “I understand the crushing costs of health care. I understand that we have to fight the insurance companies. But I also understand that abortion is wrong,” he said on the floor. Ultimately, Cao voted no.²⁵

Nevertheless, the House passed the Affordable Care Act and President Obama signed it into law in March 2010. The net effect of Cao’s waffling was to enrage at one point or another both conservatives and progressives in his district.

On other hot-button social issues, Cao was far out of step with social conservatives. He cosponsored and voted for the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Law) that provided federal and local law enforcement with more resources to investigate and prevent hate crimes and stiffened federal criminal penalties for individuals convicted of carrying out hate crimes. He also supported legislation to repeal the U.S. military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prevented gay men and women from serving openly.

Cao was an ardent advocate for his constituents—never more so than in the wake of the single most salient event to affect them during the 111th Congress: the massive, slow-motion disaster that unfolded when the British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon wellhead spewed millions of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico over the course of a month in the late spring of 2010. In June, when Members of Congress grilled BP America President Lamar McKay over his company’s handling of the massive spill disaster, Cao noted that, while some Members of Congress were calling for McKay to resign, “in the Asian culture we do things differently. During the Samurai days, we just give you a knife and ask you to commit hara-kiri.”²⁶

Cao sought to protect the watermen in his district, many of them Vietnamese who were virtually put out of business. He called for swift disbursements from the \$20



billion fund that BP had agreed to set aside for victim compensation and environmental remediation efforts. Along with Mike Honda of California, the chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, he called for better communication from BP and the federal government, including bilingual information where appropriate—important for many in the Vietnamese community—immediate financial assistance and job training, and the direct intervention of federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Health and Human Services to address public health concerns and long-term environmental damages. “This nation knows now how devastating the oil spill has become for the Gulf’s environmental ecosystem,” Cao and Honda wrote in an editorial. “What it has yet to realize, however, is the potential impending devastation to the other equally vital onshore ecosystems—social, economic, and cultural—the most vulnerable of which is the Southeast Asian and African-American fishing and seafood industry communities.”²⁷

Cao spoke on the floor on dozens of occasions during his single term in the House, but with few exceptions, his remarks were usually relegated to one-minute speeches. No significant piece of legislation bore his name or primary sponsorship. While he introduced 22 measures, from protesting Vietnamese human rights abuses to improving the Federal Emergency Management Agency and disaster response, to allowing states and local governments to revise disaster recovery and mitigation plans, none became law. A handful of his amendments to major bills were passed on the House Floor, including an amendment to the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 that provided federal funding to organizations and institutions serving small businesses along the Gulf Coast that had suffered from the oil spill.²⁸

From his election night in 2008, Democrats marked Cao for the 2010 election cycle. Cedric Richmond, a longtime state representative, announced in September 2009 that he would seek the Democratic nomination to challenge Cao. Richmond had opposed Jefferson in the crowded 2008 Democratic primary, but had fallen short due to lack of name recognition. Even before Cao’s

turnabout on the health care legislation, Richmond argued that Cao’s vote against the 2009 stimulus, which included money for coastal restoration and flood prevention, threatened the well-being of New Orleans’s residents.²⁹

The electoral math for Cao to win re-election was complicated enough, but his position on hot-button issues also led social conservatives within his own party to target him. Conservative Christian interest groups ran ads during the campaign attacking his record of support for gay rights. One demanded, “Who is Rep. Joseph Cao representing in Washington?” before claiming that he sought “to advance the radical social agendas of homosexual activists” by placing voters’ “personal liberties at jeopardy.”³⁰

In an historic election that yielded Republicans a gain of 65 seats, sweeping them back into the House majority, Cao was one of the few GOP losses on the national map. Richmond prevailed handily, winning 65 percent of the vote to Cao’s 33 percent.³¹ Cao gave no farewell address in the House Chamber, nor were any made by colleagues on his behalf. After he left the House in January 2011, Cao returned to New Orleans, where he currently practices law. In 2016 he ran as an unsuccessful Republican candidate for a U.S. Senate seat from Louisiana.

NOTES

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“NEVER IN MY LIFE DID I
THINK I COULD BE A FUTURE
CONGRESSMAN. THE AMERICAN
DREAM IS WELL AND ALIVE.”

Anh (Joseph) Cao
USA Today, December 8, 2008

Charles Djou

1970–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2010–2011

REPUBLICAN FROM HAWAII

In May 2010, Charles Djou won a surprise special election victory to become only the second Republican since statehood to represent Hawaii in the U.S. House of Representatives. Although his career on Capitol Hill lasted only a few months, Djou worked to control spending and lower taxes, and he was not afraid to break ties with his party on issues he felt strongly about.

Charles J. Djou was born in Los Angeles, California, on August 9, 1970. Both of his parents had immigrated to the United States from across the Pacific. His father was born in Shanghai, China, and fled to Hong Kong during the Chinese Communist Revolution in the late 1940s. Djou's mother grew up in Bangkok, Thailand.¹ When he was a boy, Djou's family moved to Hawaii and settled on the southeastern side of Oahu.² He graduated in 1988 from the famed Punahou School in Honolulu and traveled east for college, earning both a bachelor of arts degree in political science and a bachelor of science degree in finance from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1992.³ Four years later he earned a law degree from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

In 2001 Djou joined the United States Army Reserve and served in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, a light infantry division, from 2011 to 2012.⁴ Afterward, in his private career, Djou worked as an attorney for a small number of firms in Hawaii. He married Stacey Kawasaki, whom he had met shortly after law school when they worked for the same law practice. They have three children, Nick, Tori, and Alli.⁵

In 1998 Djou waged an unsuccessful campaign for a seat in Hawaii's state house of representatives. But two years later, he ran again and won, serving the Kahaluu and Kaneohe areas on Oahu's east coast. In the state house, he served on the finance committee, the labor and public

employment committee, the public safety and military affairs committee, and the transportation committee.⁶ He had a reliably conservative voting record, opposing legislative pay raises and working to shrink Hawaii's spending.⁷ As a member of the finance committee, Djou led the push to open its budget deliberations to public view.⁸ In mid-January 2002, in just his first term, Djou was elected party floor leader, becoming the youngest Republican officer in the Hawaiian legislature's history.⁹

After one term, redistricting erased his seat in the state house and drew him into a neighboring district represented by a fellow incumbent.¹⁰ In response, Hawaii Republicans began drafting Djou to run for lieutenant governor. Djou declined, however, and began exploring a run for the Honolulu city council.¹¹

To prepare for the city council run, Djou moved to East Honolulu, not far from where his wife's family lived. By the summer of 2002, he began to earn solid reviews in the Honolulu newspapers.¹² To combat what he saw as runaway spending, Djou wanted to refocus the city's finances on "core city services, like road paving and law enforcement salaries."¹³ Honolulu's public service sector "should be something that hums neatly and efficiently in the background," he said.¹⁴ Djou won the general election that November, beginning what became nearly a decade-long stint on the city council.¹⁵

Djou became perhaps the most prominent conservative on the city council during the 2000s. He fought tax increases, looked to cap spending, and repeatedly voted against the city's budget, which grew year after year. He worked to pass ethics reform, improve Honolulu's recycling program and increase its use of "alternative energy."¹⁶ Djou cycled on and off as chairman of the powerful zoning committee, using his influence to put a proposal to build a \$5 billion rail project up for a public vote.¹⁷





Early in 2010, the incumbent Representative from Hawaii's 1st District, Neil Abercrombie, resigned from the House to focus on his gubernatorial campaign, opening a seat that encompassed Djou's hometown.¹⁸ Abercrombie had served in the House since 1991, creating a 20-year backlog of Honolulu politicians looking to serve in national office. Djou, according to one Capitol Hill newspaper, had been planning for an eventual House campaign as early as November 2007.¹⁹ Following Abercrombie's resignation, Djou decided to run for both the special election to serve out the remainder of the 111th Congress (2009–2011) as well as the general election for the 112th Congress (2011–2013) in November 2010.²⁰

Republicans on the mainland quickly took interest in Djou's candidacy. In the first half of 2009, the National Republican Congressional Committee, the party's House campaign arm, included Djou in its "Young Guns" program and ran ads criticizing Abercrombie for his support of the recent stimulus package. Taking a more moderate stance, Djou argued that Republicans and Democrats needed to "work together" to spend the funds "wisely."²¹ "For me," Djou said a few weeks later, "my campaign has been about bringing a sense of accountability and responsibility back to the federal government."²²

Based on the returns from the 2008 election, when Democrats won by a landslide in the 1st District, Djou's candidacy looked like a longshot.²³ But he remained optimistic heading into 2010, saying, "I think the Republican Party does have a good message about diversifying our economy, about trying to keep more money in the pocketbooks of consumers."²⁴

Djou's platform included a number of traditional Republican initiatives, such as job creation, trade, lowering taxes, balancing the budget, limiting earmarks, and reducing spending.²⁵ In theory, Djou also supported reforming parts of America's health care system but wanted to see Congress include changes to malpractice insurance and to allow insurance companies to sell plans across state lines.²⁶ "Djou is everything the GOP could hope for in a viable Hawaii candidate," said one editorial in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* later that month, "local,

moderate, against all tax increases and is even an officer in the Army Reserve."²⁷

Despite some conservative tendencies in the district, Hawaii was historically Democratic and was President Barack Obama's home state. Djou maintained a much more moderate tone compared to the election politics on the mainland, and his long service on the Honolulu city council also made him well versed in the district's issues. Political handicappers predicted a close race.²⁸ "Nothing can make a powerful statement for the Republicans about the 2010 midterm elections than to send a Republican from Barack Obama's hometown to the Congress in the special election," Djou told *Roll Call* in March 2010.²⁹

Hawaii conducted the special election almost entirely by mail-in ballot, and on May 22, Djou defied the early odds and won, taking 39.4 percent of a surprisingly large turnout and beating the two leading Democrats, state senator Colleen Hanabusa and former U.S. Representative Ed Case, who split the Democratic vote.³⁰ Djou became only the second Republican Representative from Hawaii to serve in the House (before statehood, Hawaii had sent a number of Republican Delegates to the House). "The congressional seat is not owned by one political party," Djou said after his victory. "This congressional seat is owned by the people."³¹

Two days after his victory Djou and his family flew to Washington.³² Just after 5:00 p.m. on May 25, 2010, Charles Djou took the oath of office and was sworn in by Speaker Nancy Pelosi. After introductory remarks by Congresswoman Mazie Hirono of Hawaii and House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio, Djou addressed the chamber. "I want all the voters to know that every single day I have the privilege of serving them I will never, ever forget the trust and confidence they have vested in me," he said. "It is a testimony to the greatness of the United States of America that I, a son of immigrants from China and Thailand, have the privilege of calling myself a Member of the United States Congress."³³

House Republicans assigned Djou to two popular and powerful committees, the Armed Services Committee and the Budget Committee.³⁴ On the Armed Services Committee, a natural home for the Army reservist with a large military constituency, he served on two subcommittees,



the Subcommittee on Readiness and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities.

His first appearance with the Budget Committee occurred on June 9, 2010, when the House heard testimony from Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke. From his seat on the dais, Djou questioned Bernanke about the viability of additional economic stimulus and whether new free trade agreements would help the U.S. economy.³⁵ A month later, during another Budget Committee hearing on the effects of the 2009 stimulus, Djou seemed to reach across the aisle, telling the Secretary of Agriculture that he was “far more concerned about fixing things and looking forward in the future than continuing to lay partisan blame.”³⁶

Entering the House in late May during an election year, however, left Djou with little time to legislate. He introduced his first bill (H.R. 5720) on July 13, 2010, and offered his final bill of the 111th Congress only a month later, just before Congress recessed for the summer. In total, Djou introduced 12 resolutions during the 111th Congress, including two bills to rename post offices in Honolulu; the FACT Act (H.R. 5857), which would have lowered corporate income tax; the Family Reunification Act of 2010 (H.R. 5880), which would have amended certain immigration requirements; and the Citizenship and Service Act of 2010 (H.R. 6327), which would have enabled undocumented young people to become “conditional permanent” U.S. residents if they met certain educational qualifications. Djou also broke from his party on a handful of hot-button issues. He was one of only five Republicans to vote for the repeal of the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy and later was one of only eight Republicans to vote for an immigration overhaul.³⁷

On the House Floor, Djou often used his congressional megaphone to recognize and praise the accomplishments of his constituents.³⁸ He also spoke in favor of America’s trade deal with South Korea and supported the House GOP’s crowd-sourced budget-reducing tool called YouCut.³⁹

During debate on H.R. 5822, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2011, Djou sided with the Obama administration and lamented the decision by House Republicans not to

include his amendment that would have restored funding to help America’s Armed Forces begin moving from Okinawa, Japan, to Guam. Later, toward the end of the 111th Congress, Djou strongly supported H. Res. 1735, which condemned North Korea for attacking South Korea on November 23, 2010. “We must strengthen our bonds between the United States and South Korea to stand as a bulwark against the aggressive and repressive North Korean Government,” he said.⁴⁰

Djou’s career in the House lasted only a few months. Whereas Democrats had split the ticket during the special election, he faced only Colleen Hanabusa heading into the general election. Djou was in a dead heat with Hanabusa by mid-October and raised more than a half million dollars as voting neared.⁴¹ In an effort to help his candidacy, House Minority Leader Boehner promised to assign him to the powerful Appropriations Committee if the GOP took the House.⁴² Two weeks before Election Day, however, Djou experienced a large setback when Hanabusa won the endorsement of the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*.⁴³ In the end, Djou took 46 percent of the vote and lost the general election by 11,417 votes.⁴⁴

After his loss, Djou returned to Capitol Hill for the remainder of the Congress. In his last address, Djou thanked the voters of the 1st District for the opportunity to serve them in the House. “I believe that a vibrant two-party democracy is better at preserving liberty than one-party monolithic rule,” he said. “But I also believe one of the beauties of our Nation is that the voters always have the final say... Yielding to the final word of the voters is something that I always will respect.”⁴⁵

After leaving the House, Djou returned to Hawaii. In 2012 he won the Republican nomination for his old seat, but lost in the general election. He ran again in 2014, but lost in the GOP primary. In June 2016, Djou entered a three-way race for mayor of Honolulu against the incumbent Kirk Caldwell and the city’s previous mayor Peter Carlisle. In a close campaign, Djou came in second to Caldwell, but since neither candidate received a majority of the votes, the election headed to a runoff. Djou ended up losing the runoff later that November.⁴⁶



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Hansen Clarke

1957–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2011–2013

DEMOCRAT FROM MICHIGAN

In 2010 Hansen Clarke unseated a seven-term incumbent in the Democratic primary before going on to represent the city of Detroit in the U.S. House of Representatives for one term. His path to the House was as unique as it was unconventional. Clarke had a casual, approachable way about him, and he asked people to refer to him simply as “Hansen.”¹ In 2005 the *Detroit Free Press* called his life an “underdog story ... a classic,” an “up-from-the-east-side hard-luck tale.”² Indeed, the struggle of his childhood shaped his political philosophy and oriented him toward policies that he hoped would help both Michigan’s disadvantaged citizens and its businesses.

Hansen Clarke was born Molik Hashim in Detroit, Michigan, on March 2, 1957, the son of an African-American mother and a Bangladeshi father.³ His father, Mozaffar Ali Hashim, worked at a Detroit automobile factory, but he died when Clarke was only eight years old, leaving his mother, Thelma Clarke, to raise him on a school crossing guard’s salary.⁴ His neighbors stepped in to help, and when he was 14 years old Clarke moved east to New Hampshire to attend Phillips Exeter Academy, one of the country’s elite high schools. Surrounded by wealth and prestige, Clarke felt out of place and, after two years, returned home to Detroit. “All I knew was this block,” he said years later, standing outside his childhood house in what one national magazine called “one of the toughest neighborhoods on the east side.”⁵ Phillips Exeter might as well have been a world away. “I couldn’t handle it,” he recalled.⁶

Clarke eventually accepted a scholarship to Cornell University and moved back east to study art.⁷ Tragedy struck when his mother died in 1976. As he grieved, Clarke returned to Detroit and scraped by, eventually going on government assistance. In 1978 he changed his name to Hansen Clarke to honor his mother. Ultimately, he made it back to Cornell with the help of his godmother

and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1984. Three years later Clarke earned a law degree from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.⁸

After law school, Clarke began practicing as an attorney. He cemented his local public service credentials while running the Detroit district office of U.S. Representative John Conyers of Michigan and working for Wayne County Executive Edward H. McNamara.⁹ Clarke made the jump to elective office in the early 1990s, serving in the Michigan state house of representatives from 1991 to 1992 and again from 1999 to 2002. In 2003 he began an eight-year stint in the state senate.

In 2005 Clarke ran a very personal race for mayor of Detroit, filling his campaign with vignettes from his childhood and reflecting on the example set by his mother. As a candidate, Clarke promised to clean up Detroit and hoped to convince people to stay in the city rather than move to the suburbs. He ran as a reform candidate, pledging to dismantle the patronage system in city hall and “change the political culture of the city.”¹⁰ Despite his populist message, Clarke finished fourth in the city primary.¹¹

After the election, Clarke returned to the state senate and his seat on the appropriations committee, where he protected funding for his beleaguered city.¹² In 2008, as Michigan reeled from the housing crisis, he introduced a popular bill to protect homeowners in foreclosure from being evicted.¹³ Later that year, he pushed the governor to overhaul the Detroit public schools as the city system struggled financially.¹⁴

By 2010, as term limits were about to force Clarke out of the state senate, he flirted with a run for governor before deciding to challenge Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, who had represented Detroit in the U.S. House since 1997.¹⁵ In the race for the 13th District, Clarke had an early advantage over Kilpatrick, whose son





had previously been mayor of Detroit and faced a slew of federal corruption charges.¹⁶

Clarke's campaign for the House harkened back to his earlier run for mayor, focusing on the emotion and power of his life story. At the heart of the 13th District was his old neighborhood, which had been plagued by violence and loss over the years.¹⁷ It was a struggle Clarke knew intimately.¹⁸ "All my life I've been afraid that I'm going to wind up on the streets," he said in 2010.¹⁹ Despite having a law degree from one of the country's leading schools, Clarke held on to his taxi license for two decades just in case things went south again.²⁰ "I still hate that I had to leave," Clarke confessed during his earlier mayoral campaign. "I wanted to make it here, to show what could be done in Detroit."²¹

Clarke ran perhaps the most unique race of the 2010 election cycle. "I'm from the neighborhood," he reminded his local paper. "So I don't think we're going to need a lot of money for commercials."²² Instead, as reported by the *Detroit Free Press*, he "used an unconventional campaign strategy, enlisting homeless people and panhandlers to spread his message, going to soup kitchens and shelters to tell people they could, in small and large ways, control their own fate."²³ Clarke's empowerment narrative allowed him to reach voters everywhere and seemed to blur conventional party divisions, never more directly during the election than when he described his brand of politics as equal parts "Newt Gingrich and Malcolm X."²⁴

Clarke's House campaign received a boost shortly before the primary when Detroit's major newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, endorsed him. Clarke cast himself as the city's best shot to replace Kilpatrick in the House and a few days later won with 47 percent of the vote, which, in the heavily Democratic 13th District, was tantamount to winning the general election. "This was bigger than an opponent and not about the incumbent or a family," Clarke said the night he won. "You must be mindful that elected officials come and go, but people, not politicians, always have the power."²⁵ In the general election, Clarke buried his Republican opponent, John Hauler, with 79 percent of the vote.²⁶

Clarke's message to Detroit had always been resilience. Even after his victory he continued to appeal directly to people who struggled to get by but who time and again rebounded from setback. Clarke promised to represent every part of his constituency, from rich to poor, but he was not afraid to cast his story in stark relief to the wealthier Detroit suburbs which had been devastated by the housing market collapse. "The people out there were making six figures a year and now a lot of them are in foreclosure," he said to a homeless audience shortly after the November elections. "They think this is the end of the world for them, but you and I know better. People like us are strong, not despite what we have been through, but because of it."²⁷

Although Democrats had lost their House majority in the 2010 elections, Clarke had a full legislative agenda when he arrived in Washington: job creation, foreclosure relief, and insurance premium reform.²⁸ For Clarke, the act of legislating was about people and "knowing what they're going through." But Clarke also pointed out that he was not in Washington merely to represent the interests of the underserved. "I've got to work for the employers as well," he observed, "because that's the only way my folks are going to get employed."²⁹

In the House, Democratic leaders appointed Clarke to two committees, the Committee on Homeland Security and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.³⁰ On the Homeland Security Committee, Clarke served on the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee and the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications Subcommittee. On the Science, Space, and Technology Committee, Clarke served only on the Subcommittee on Research and Science Education.

That Clarke was not appointed to one of the powerful money committees did not stop him from trying to pump federal tax dollars directly to Detroit. Shortly before he took office, Clarke told *Newsweek* magazine, "I'm a Democrat because I believe tax dollars can be used for the common good, but between Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes I come right down the middle. As a progressive I want to pay down the debt. I think it can be done by cutting some taxes, and by putting people back to work."³¹



By the fall of his first term, Clarke had sketched out a revolutionary plan using a similar principle to rescue his hometown: the federal government would return to the city every single tax dollar it collected from Detroit for five years. Clarke estimated his program would be worth \$2 billion a year and believed it would balance the city's budget, cover many of Detroit's pension plans, and help pay down its debt. Detroit would also continue to receive the same Medicare and Social Security grants it had always received. To encourage people to move back into the city, Clarke wanted Detroit to slash its property taxes and abolish its personal income tax. Clarke figured Detroit could be the country's pilot program which, if it succeeded, Congress could apply to other cities.³²

Clarke's rescue plan never made it beyond the idea stage, but he was active on a number of legislative fronts. During the 112th Congress (2011–2013), he introduced 26 bills, four House Resolutions, and 12 floor amendments. Some were broad, ambitious pieces of legislation, like his Detroit Growth and Sustainability Act, which authorized \$500 million in loans to his hometown. Others were more itemized efforts, like his push to suspend the import fees on products used by the auto industry. Clarke spoke passionately on the floor about reducing America's debt burden, improving America's educational system, and protecting America's labor unions.³³ He also offered floor amendments to appropriations bills to boost funding for certain programs, including \$5 million for the Women, Infants, and Children Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which the House approved as part of the consolidated funding bill in late 2011. In the summer of 2011, he teamed up with Republican Representative Dan Benishek of northern Michigan to tour each other's district and encourage job creation across the state.³⁴

Clarke's time on Capitol Hill was cut short, however, after Michigan lost a seat in the House following the 2010 Census. When the state redrew its district boundaries, the mapmakers moved much of Clarke's core support to the newly redrawn 14th District. In August 2011, Clarke announced he would seek the seat in the new 14th District. By fall he faced a tough primary contest against

multiple candidates, including another Democratic House incumbent, Gary Peters, who had formerly represented the 9th District.³⁵ During the campaign, Clarke refused to participate in any of the primary debates after reports surfaced claiming that his mother's death certificate recorded her race as white. Clarke's campaign released a statement in late June 2012 criticizing "the use of racist rhetoric and race-baiting" during the campaign, and a few days later came out with even stronger language accusing his opponents of going "after my dead parents" because "they can't attack my record."³⁶ By early August, however, polls showed Clarke trailing by a wide margin, and he was never able to make up the difference. Clarke did well among voters in the city, but he could not match Peters's support in the adjacent suburbs.³⁷

After losing in the Democratic primary, Clarke finished out the 112th Congress. Two years later, when Peters announced he would run for the Senate, Clarke announced his candidacy for Michigan's 14th District.³⁸ Over the summer of 2014, polls showed him with a comfortable lead and wide name recognition.³⁹ Clarke ran on a plan to help lower America's student-loan debt, but after national women's organizations threw their support behind his main opponent in the primary, Southfield mayor Brenda Lawrence, Clarke saw his numbers slip.⁴⁰ On August 5, he lost in the Democratic primary.⁴¹

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Mark Takai

1967–2016

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2015–2016
DEMOCRAT FROM HAWAII

Immediately after finishing graduate school, Mark Takai dedicated himself to public service. He served the state of Hawaii for the rest of his life, first in the state house of representatives and then in Congress. During his legislative career, Takai drew on his experiences as a college athlete, small-business owner, and Iraq War veteran. He consistently stressed “putting Hawaii and its people first.” His political career ended abruptly when he was diagnosed with cancer, and he announced that he would not seek re-election barely a year into his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives. After his death, Hawaii’s governor, David Ige, eulogized his longtime friend: “Mark humbly and effectively served the people of his state House and Congressional districts. In the often tumultuous world of politics, he has been a shining example of what it means to be a public servant.”¹

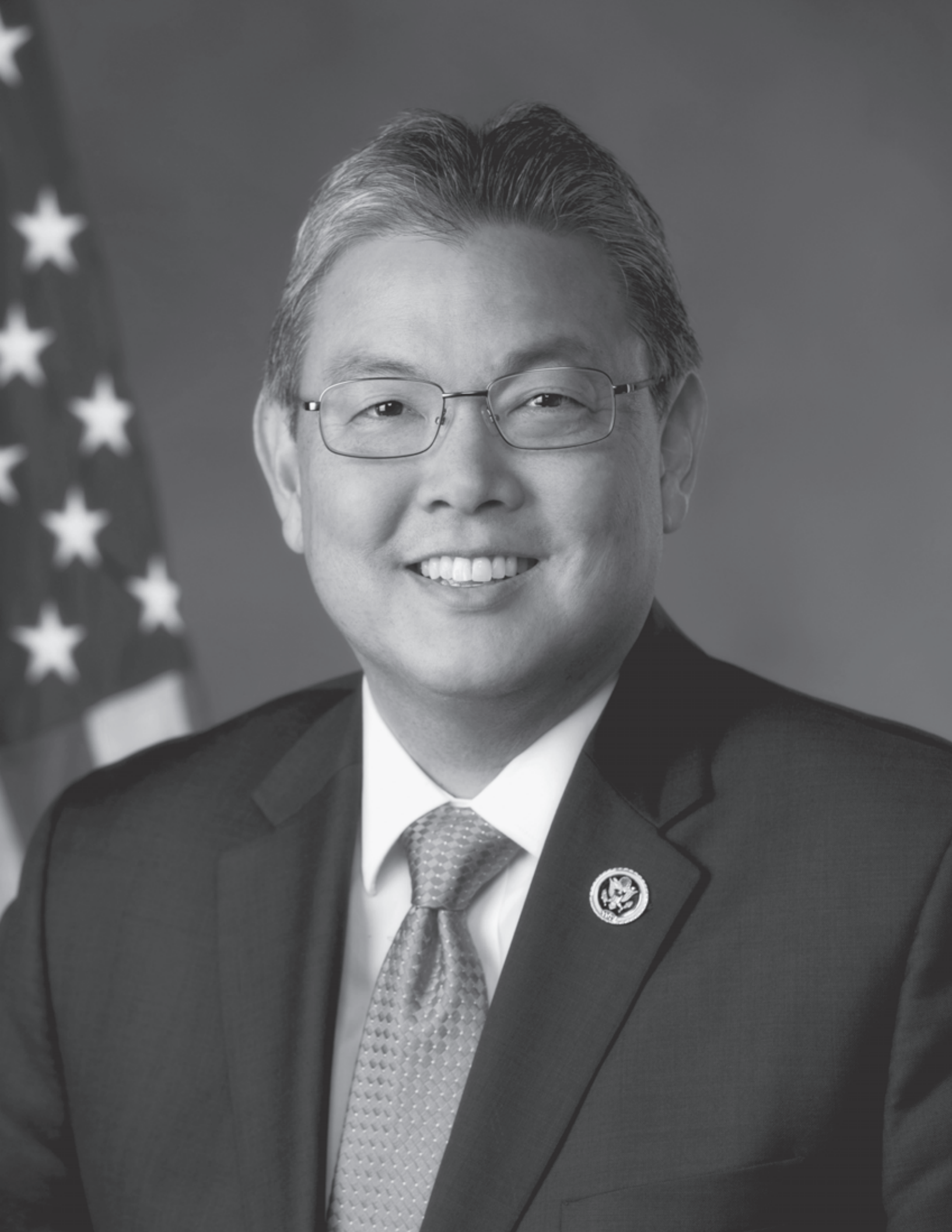
Kyle Mark Takai was born on July 1, 1967, in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Erik, an electrical engineer, and Naomi Takai, a public servant in the city and county of Honolulu. Mark, his brother, and two sisters grew up in suburban Honolulu. In 1985 Takai graduated from Pearl City High School in Pearl City, Hawaii, and then attended the University of Hawaii in Manoa, Hawaii, where he was editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, student body president, and a champion swimmer.² He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science in 1990 and earned a master’s in public health in 1993. Takai met his future wife, Sami Aya, while attending college, and they married soon after graduation and had two children, Matthew and Kaila. Mark and Sami ran a small insurance brokerage and consulting firm from their home in Hawaii.³

Takai began a lengthy career in politics in 1994, winning election to the Hawaii house of representatives from the Aiea region in western Honolulu County. He vigorously defended funding for state schools and his

alma mater, the University of Hawaii, proposing a fund to match public donations with state money to maintain the school’s sports programs. He also procured funding for the university’s library and labs.⁴ Takai’s decision in 1999 to join the Hawaii Army National Guard reinforced his support for veterans’ issues. He introduced legislation creating the Hawaii Medal of Honor—the first of its kind in the nation—to salute the state’s fallen soldiers and their families. He also supported the creation of the Veterans Treatment Court, which pooled the resources of the state courts and federal veterans’ affairs services to offer better access to treatment and counseling for veterans seeking employment and health care.⁵

As a member of the National Guard, Takai was twice called to active duty for six-month periods. He remained in Hawaii in an administrative capacity as the deputy state surgeon in 2005 and then deployed to Iraq as a preventive medical officer in 2009. He retained his seat in the state legislature during both activations and relied primarily on David Ige, then a state senator, to help cover his legislative duties.⁶ He returned from deployment to serve as vice speaker from 2005 to 2006. From 2012 to 2013, Takai served as president of the Hawaii National Guard Association and was instrumental in bringing the national conference to Hawaii in 2013.⁷ By 2015 he had attained the rank of a lieutenant colonel.

The opportunity for Takai’s congressional candidacy arose when Colleen Hanabusa vacated her House seat representing urban Oahu to run for the U.S. Senate. Takai entered a Democratic primary field that included six other candidates, among them state senate president Donna Mercado Kim. Takai won a 43 percent plurality in the October primary.⁸ He faced former Representative Charles Djou in the general election. Both candidates touted their military service, but the campaign largely boiled down to





fundamental differences in political philosophy about the size of the government. Takai also stressed the importance of a united Hawaiian delegation.⁹ Takai received the endorsement of the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, which provided him with a boost in an unusually close campaign for the Democratic stronghold. Takai prevailed, winning 52 percent of the vote.¹⁰

Coming out of that tight race, Takai displayed optimism for bipartisanship in the weeks before the Opening Day of the 114th Congress (2015–2017). “I do believe we have a window of opportunity to bring everybody together to deliver for this nation,” he said, “and I want to be part of that.”¹¹ He focused much of his attention on his committee assignments, Armed Services and Small Business. He prioritized small businesses, protecting the environment, reforming student loan debt, and improving veterans’ care. His first proposed legislation would have made it easier for Filipino veterans of World War II to reunite with their families living in the United States.¹²

In November 2015, Takai announced he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The following May, Takai shared that the cancer had spread despite treatment and that he had decided not to seek re-election. “In life, we often make plans for ourselves,” he observed. “I had envisioned a long career in the U.S. House of Representatives, building up the seniority and influence that were key to Sen. (Daniel) Inouye’s ability to deliver for Hawaii. But as often happens, we find ourselves on a different journey than what we had planned.”¹³ Mark Takai died on July 20, 2016, at his home in Honolulu.

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“I DO BELIEVE WE HAVE A
WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY
TO BRING EVERYBODY
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Mark Takai

Honolulu Star-Advertiser, January 19, 2009