



Image courtesy of the Member

Grace Meng

1975–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2013–
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW YORK

As a lifelong resident of Queens, Grace Meng has staked her career on protecting the interests of her New York City constituents. In the state assembly, she became known for focusing on results and putting aside party and personal politics. “That’s the one thing I probably don’t like about politics,” she said during her first congressional campaign, “the focus on the individual. To me, it’s more important to get it done, whether I get the credit for it or not.”¹

Grace Meng was born in Queens, New York, on October 1, 1975, the daughter of immigrants Shiao-Mei and Jimmy Meng, who owned and operated a lumber company.² She graduated from Stuyvesant High School in New York City in 1993 and then attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she studied Chinese and history. After receiving her BA in 1997, Meng considered teaching but shifted her focus to law. She returned to New York and received her JD from Yeshiva University in New York City in 2002.³ She briefly worked as a public interest lawyer and at a public relations firm before volunteering at her father’s Flushing-area district office after his election as the first Asian-American member of the New York state assembly. Meng led her father’s district office after his election. In 2005 she married Korean-American dentist and professor Wayne Kye, with whom she has two sons, Tyler and Brandon.⁴

In 2008 Meng defeated her opponent, Ellen Young, by 18 percent to win a seat in the New York state assembly.⁵ Meng dedicated her time to constituent services, a priority she continues to pride herself on, given the unique and diverse needs of her congressional district.⁶ She also built a reputation for bipartisanship, stating, “Being the only Asian American in the State Legislature, I’ve had no choice but to reach across the aisle.” Among her key legislative achievements were eliminating the term “Oriental” from most state documents as well as authoring the Reverse Mortgage Act of 2009.⁷ Seven of her bills in the assembly were ultimately signed into law. She easily won re-election in 2010 and was later selected as a delegate to the 2012 Democratic National Convention.⁸

When U.S. Representative Gary Ackerman retired from his district in northern Queens, Meng entered the race for the vacant seat. New York’s 6th Congressional District, home to sizable Chinese and Korean immigrant communities, included a portion of Meng’s assembly district in Flushing. Endorsed by Ackerman and Representative Joe Crowley, she ran on a platform of improving transportation, increasing school funding, and bringing more jobs to the area through tax incentives.⁹ Meng won the primary with 52 percent

of the vote, defeating three other candidates for the nomination.¹⁰ She defeated Republican councilman Daniel J. Halloran III in the general election with 60 percent of the vote, becoming the first Asian-American Member of Congress from New York.¹¹

In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Meng was appointed to the Foreign Affairs and Small Business Committees. On the latter, she served as Ranking Member on the Contracting and Workforce Subcommittee. Meng won appointment to the prestigious Appropriations Committee at the start of the 115th Congress (2017–2019).

Representative Meng has remained district-focused while serving in Congress. She established the Quiet Skies Caucus to prioritize eliminating noise pollution due to the frequency of flights near her Queens district as well as the Congressional Kids' Safety Caucus.¹² She also sought a National Park Service study to mark historic sites in Queens (H.R. 3222) and was successful in securing its inclusion in the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act.¹³

Meng proved to be an unusually active freshman legislator. She successfully passed legislation through the House amending the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to classify the desecration of cemeteries as a violation of religious freedom, and President Barack Obama signed it into law on August 8, 2014.¹⁴ From her position on the Foreign Affairs Committee, she fought for funding and protection for the State of Israel, reflecting the large Jewish population within her district.¹⁵

Meng won re-election unopposed in 2014, after which Democratic Party leadership selected her as an Assistant Whip.¹⁶ In the 114th Congress (2015–2017), Meng continued to support her district by focusing on small businesses and defending the rights of women and minorities. She has maintained her reputation as an active legislator. She reintroduced her Anti-Spoofing Act that passed the full House during the 113th Congress and successfully shepherded legislation to strike all uses of the term "Oriental" from federal law. President Obama signed it into law in May 2016.¹⁷

Meng won re-election to the 115th Congress with 72 percent of the vote.

NOTES

- 1 David W. Chen, "A Breakthrough Candidate and Potential Star," 27 June 2012, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/28/nyregion/grace-meng-is-rising-star-for-asian-new-yorkers.html> (accessed 9 March 2016).
- 2 *Politics in America, 2014* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 2013): 677.
- 3 Chen, "A Breakthrough Candidate and Potential Star"; Charles Lam, "Rep. Grace Meng on Civic Engagement, Public Service, and Being Chinese American," 28 February 2013, *Northwest Asian Weekly*, <http://www.nwasianweekly.com/2013/02/rep-grace-meng-on-civic-engagement-public-service-and-being-chinese-american-the-first-asian-american-congressperson-from-the-east-coast-speaks-with-the-asian-weekly/> (accessed 14 March 2016).
- 4 "Grace Meng, Wayne Kye," 12 June 2005, *New York Times*: 14.
- 5 Sally Goldenberg and Maggie Haberman, "Silver's Golden in Primary Win," 10 September 2008, *New York Post*: 15; Jonathan P. Hicks, "In Assembly Seat's Past, a Hint of Musical Chairs," 11 September 2008, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/12/nyregion/12flushing.html> (accessed 10 March 2016).
- 6 Daniel Edward Rosen, "Lost in Translation Pol: Non-English Signs an Emergency Risk," 14 April 2010, *Daily News* (New York): 44; Leigh Remizowski, "At a Glance," 21 April 2010, *Daily News* (New York): 28.
- 7 Chen, "A Breakthrough Candidate and Potential Star."
- 8 Joe Anuta, "Meng, Stavisky Win Dem Delegate Spots," 30 January 2012, *TimesLedger* (New York): n.p.
- 9 Joe Anuta, "Meng Explains Bid for House," 25 May 2012, *TimesLedger* (New York): n.p.
- 10 Joe Anuta, "Meng Clinches Dem Primary," 27 June 2012, *TimesLedger* (New York): n.p.
- 11 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.
- 12 Grace Meng, "Airplane Noise in Queens," 30 August 2013, *New York Times*: 18.
- 13 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (15 September 2014): H7494–7495.
- 14 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 2nd sess. (28 May 2014): H4850–4851.
- 15 Dmitriy Shapiro, "N.Y. legislator Grace Meng an Emerging Pro-Jewish Voice in Congress," 3 June 2014, *Washington Jewish Week*, <http://www.jns.org/latest-articles/2014/6/3/ny-legislator-grace-meng-an-emerging-pro-jewish-voice-in-congress#.U49byiiGdot> (accessed 11 March 2016).
- 16 Congresswoman Grace Meng, "Meng Named Assistant Whip," press release, 15 April 2015, accessed 14 March 2016, <https://meng.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/meng-named-assistant-whip>.
- 17 Madina Toure, "Meng Bill Seeking Removal of 'Oriental' Term Now Law," 30 May 2016, *TimesLedger* (New York): n.p.