



Image courtesy of the Member

Mark Takano 1960–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2013–
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

Mark Takano won election in 2012 as the first openly gay person of color in Congress. A high school teacher with three decades of experience, Takano focuses on education benefits for veterans from his position on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Mark Takano was born December 10, 1960, in Riverside, California. The son of Japanese Americans, his parents and grandparents were uprooted from their California and Washington state homes and sent to internment camps during World War II. After the war, they resettled in Riverside County.¹ Takano attended La Sierra High School in Riverside, graduating as class valedictorian in 1979. He received an AB degree in government from Harvard University in 1983. Takano planned to attend law school but decided to try teaching in the Boston suburbs. He earned his teaching certificate from the School of Education at the University of California, Riverside, upon returning to California to teach English and social studies at Riverside's Rialto High School. Takano also served on the board of trustees at Riverside Community College. Eventually becoming the board's longest-serving member, he twice served as its president.²

Takano first ran for a Riverside County-based U.S. House of Representatives seat in 1992, losing to Republican Representative Ken Calvert by 519 votes. He lost a rematch against Calvert in 1994.³ In 2012 redistricting created a new U.S. House district encompassing the western parts of Riverside County, including a cache of traditionally Democratic voters.⁴ Takano announced his candidacy in July 2011.⁵ In California's new open primary, wherein the top two candidates advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation, he emerged in second place behind Republican Riverside County supervisor John Tavaglione in a five-candidate race.⁶ Takano stressed job creation and training as well as education reform in the general election and defeated Tavaglione with 59 percent of the vote.⁷

Takano's initial committee assignments included Science, Space, and Technology and Veterans' Affairs. Midway through the 113th Congress (2013–2015), he picked up a seat on the Education and the Workforce Committee. Takano now serves as the Vice Ranking Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and was its Ranking Member in the 114th Congress (2015–2017). Much of his legislation originated from this committee work. His first bill in Congress was the VetSuccess Enhancement Act, which extended the period during which veterans with service-connected disabilities could enroll in the Veterans Administration training and rehabilitation programs.⁸

Student veterans are a particular focus for Takano. His Work-Study for Student Veterans Act allowed veteran students to get paid jobs on campuses or in Department of Veterans Affairs facilities.⁹ The Veterans Education Outcomes Act, introduced in March 2014, attempted to help the federal government better track data on veterans through school and subsequent employment.¹⁰ “In order to know if we are properly serving our student veterans and how we can improve this service, we need to see the numbers,” Takano said.¹¹ He also introduced the Warriors’ Peer-Outreach Pilot Program Act, which granted paid work-study jobs for veterans using the GI Bill for peer outreach and mentoring programs.¹² Takano was a cofounder of the bipartisan Work for Warriors Caucus to promote awareness for a California-based program to reduce unemployment among National Guard members.¹³ His GI Bill Fairness Act ensures that wounded Guard members receive full GI Bill benefits.¹⁴

Takano often weighs in on broader education policy. He seeks legislation increasing transparency of charter schools and protecting students who attend for-profit colleges from fraudulent practices. His Job Skills for America’s Students Act encouraged partnerships between businesses and schools, awarding tax credits for offering technical and skill training.¹⁵ Takano’s Helping Schools Protect Our Children Act provided training for teachers to spot signs of sexual abuse.¹⁶

Takano is also an advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) rights. His support for immigration reform is often couched in a call to defend binational LGBT families. Takano cosponsored legislation ensuring that veteran benefits be awarded to LGBT families even in states where gay marriage was not recognized. “Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our country, and all our returning heroes deserve to enjoy the same benefits and freedoms, no matter who they love or where they live,” he declared.¹⁷ Takano also introduced the Social Security and Medicare Parity Act, which would close loopholes in the Social Security Act to guarantee survivor benefits to same-sex couples.¹⁸

Mark Takano won re-election in 2014 and 2016 with 57 and 65 percent of the vote, respectively.¹⁹

NOTES

- 1 “Biography,” on Congressman Mark Takano’s official website, accessed 4 March 2016, <http://takano.house.gov/about/biography>.
- 2 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2013): 254.
- 3 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to present,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 4 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014*: 254; Phil Willon, “Democrats See New Chances in Inland Empire,” 16 March 2012, *Los Angeles Times*: A1.
- 5 “CA: Takano Plans Run in New District,” 5 July 2011, *The Frontrunner*: n.p.
- 6 “Tavaglione, Takano Discuss Issues in Debate for Election to New 41st District,” 11 October 2012, *Riverside County Record* (CA): 3.
- 7 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014*: 254; Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present.”
- 8 H.R. 844, 113th Cong. (2013).
- 9 H.R. 1453, 113th Cong. (2013).
- 10 H.R. 4248, 113th Cong. (2014).
- 11 “Veterans Education Outcomes Act Introduced by Democrat/Republican,” 20 March 2014, *Riverside County Record* (CA): 13.
- 12 H.R. 3056, 113th Cong. (2013).
- 13 Congressman Mark Takano, “Rep. Mark Takano and Rep. Paul Cook Form Bipartisan Work for Warriors Caucus,” press release, 8 November 2013, <https://takano.house.gov/newsroom/press-releases/>.
- 14 H.R. 1141, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 15 H.R. 1271, 113th Cong. (2013).
- 16 H.R. 5127, 113th Cong. (2014).
- 17 “Takano Helps Introduce Bipartisan Bill To Protect LGBT Veterans and Families,” 28 November 2013, *Riverside County Record* (CA): 3.
- 18 H.R. 5182, 113th Cong. (2014); H.R. 2025, 114th Cong. (2015).
- 19 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present.”