



Image courtesy of the Member

Judy Chu 1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2009–
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

The first Chinese-American woman elected to Congress in history, Judy Chu has been a cross-ethnic coalition builder throughout her career.

Judy Chu was born in Los Angeles, California, on July 7, 1953, to Judson and May Chu. Her father, a second-generation Chinese American, was a radio technician, and her mother, a war bride from China, worked in a cannery and as a stay-at-home mom.¹ Chu grew up in a predominantly African-American neighborhood in south Los Angeles.² She graduated from Buchser High School in Santa Clara, California, in 1970.

Chu earned a BA in mathematics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in 1974, an MA degree in 1977, and a PhD degree in 1979 from the California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles. She was a faculty member of UCLA's Asian American Studies Center before becoming a professor of psychology at East Los Angeles College in 1988. Chu is married to Michael Eng, a lawyer and elected official.

Chu entered politics to oppose an “English-only” anti-immigrant movement in Monterey Park in the 1980s.³ She was elected to the Garvey School Board of Education in 1985. In 1988 she won election to the Monterey Park City Council and served as mayor three times during her 13-year tenure. Chu won a California state assembly seat in 2001, earning a reputation for bridging ethnic lines.⁴ In 2006 Chu won a seat on the California Board of Equalization, the state's elected tax authority.

In February 2009, Congresswoman Hilda Solis resigned from the House of Representatives to serve as President Barack Obama's Secretary of Labor. Her district encompassed the eastern edge of Los Angeles with a majority-Hispanic, working-class electorate that was nearly two-fifths foreign born.⁵

After announcing her candidacy, Chu faced 11 opponents in the open primary. With key endorsements from the local Democratic Party and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Chu won a 32 percent plurality. She won the general election in July 2009 with 62 percent.⁶ In 2010 she was re-elected with a 71 percent majority. After reapportionment reshaped her district, Chu was re-elected in the next three general elections with 64, 59, and 67 percent of the vote.⁷

Chu was sworn in to the 111th Congress (2009–2011) on July 16, 2009. She served on the Education and Labor, Judiciary, and Oversight and Government Reform Committees. In the 112th Congress (2011–2013), she

remained on the Judiciary Committee and picked up a seat on the Small Business Committee. Chu was also elected to chair the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus starting in the 112th Congress.⁸ In the 115th Congress (2017–2019), Chu earned a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee.

One of Chu's first priorities was a congressional resolution of regret for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In 2012 Chu succeeded: both the House and Senate unanimously passed a resolution to "acknowledge the injustice of the Chinese Exclusion Act, express regret for the lives it destroyed, and make sure that the prejudice that stained our Nation is never repeated again."⁹

Chu has championed greater protections for the San Gabriel Mountains. In June 2014, she introduced the San Gabriel National Recreation Area Act (H.R. 4858) to declare large portions of the mountains a national recreation area. She followed that bill with a request for President Obama to take executive action. In October 2014, President Obama responded by declaring much of the area a national monument. She introduced subsequent bills to further expand the national monument designation.

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Access to Capital, Chu worked to help entrepreneurs. Chu's bill, the Commercial Real Estate and Economic Development Act (H.R. 2266), passed in 2015. The legislation reintroduced the Small Business Administration's Section 504 refinancing to help small businesses refinance old, expensive real estate debt at current low interest rates.

In 2011 Chu's nephew committed suicide after being hazed while serving with the Marines in Afghanistan.¹⁰ In 2016 she successfully included language into the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act that requires improved anti-hazing reporting and policies.

As the representative of a large immigrant and minority constituency, Chu brought national attention to the need for comprehensive immigration reform. In the 113th Congress (2013–2015), Chu was one of the five original House cosponsors of H.R. 15, a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Despite the bill's bipartisan support in the House and Senate, the Speaker would not bring it to the floor for a vote. However, Chu has continued her efforts to bring about immigration reform.

NOTES

- 1 "Judy Chu," in Don T. Nakanishi and Ellen D. Wu eds., *Distinguished Asian American Political and Governmental Leaders* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002): 39; *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2011): 127.
- 2 "Judy Chu," in Nakanishi and Wu eds., *Distinguished Asian American Political and Governmental Leaders*: 39; Jean Merl, "Judy Chu's Victory Makes History," 16 July 2009, *Los Angeles Times*: A3.
- 3 *Politics in America, 2012*: 126.
- 4 Richard Winton, "Chu is Known as a Bridge Builder," 18 May 2001, *Los Angeles Times*: 4; Stephanie Chavez, "Assemblywoman Praised for Reaching Across Ethnic Divide," 1 July 2001, *Los Angeles Times*: 3.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2012*: 126.
- 6 Evelyn Larrubia, "Big Names in Race to Replace Solis," 23 December 2008, *Los Angeles Times*: 3; Jean Merl, "Party Endorses Chu," 19 April 2009, *Los Angeles Times*: A36; Jean Merl, "Endorsements May Sway Key Latino Base," 17 May 2009, *Los Angeles Times*: A38; Josh Kurtz, "Chu Tops Field in Special Election to Replace Solis," 20 May 2009, *Roll Call*: n.p.; Carla Hall, "32nd Congressional District; Two Chus Are Among Choices," 21 May 2009, *Los Angeles Times*: 12; Rebecca Kimitch, "Judy Chu Wins 32nd Congressional District Race," 15 July 2009, *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* (CA): n.p.
- 7 *Almanac of American Politics, 2014* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2013): 216. Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 8 Rebecca Kimitch, "Judy Chu Off to Washington after Election Win," 15 July 2009, *Pasadena Star-News*: n.p.; Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2011): 636; *Congressional Directory*, various editions.
- 9 H. Res. 683, 112th Cong. (2012); *Congressional Record*, House, 112th Cong., 1st sess. (1 June 2011): H3810.
- 10 Sarah D. Wire, "Rep. Judy Chu's Nephew Took His Own Life After Military Hazing; Now She's Seeking Justice for Him and Other Families," 10 May 2016, *Los Angeles Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-chu-military-hazing-20160510-snap-story.html> (accessed 21 June 2017).