



## Meet U.S. Congresswoman of Pasadena, Judy Chu

By ~~JULIE CARLSON~~ ~~JULIE CARLSON~~ Congresswoman is running for her seventh term representing the 27th District.



U.S. Congresswoman Judy Chu didn't set out envisioning a life in politics. Nor did she envision having to deal with America revisiting its not-too distant prejudicial past toward Asian Americans—this time around with a viral pandemic called COVID-19.

"I never in my wildest imagination ever thought I would be in elected office," Chu says. "I didn't see a role model that would lead me to think that. I didn't see anybody like me who was in an elected office."

Chu grew up in the racially divisive, 1950s African-American neighborhood of South Los Angeles. Her household was run by her Chinese immigrant mother May, whose second language was English. Outside Chu's front doors, black children played on the sidewalks. "On television it was all white," Chu recalls. "But believe me, in the household it was China." From this experience, Chu gained tremendous insight into the diversity of America.

Due to the increase in smog and her brother's asthma, her family relocated to Santa Clara in the Bay Area. A math lover, Chu decided to attend UCLA, where she thought her talents in the computer science arena could be used. Her family remained in Northern California.



“When I went to the university, it was around the time of the civil rights and anti-war movements,” Chu explains. “There was dramatic change going on in America. It led me to want to do something with my life where I could help people.”

Clinical psychology was a field where Chu found she could be of service and empower others, so she switched majors. While in school, she interned at a rape crisis center where she was assigned as a victim advocate. She met with victims in emergency rooms, conducted counseling at the center, and assisted on the rape hotline. “These experiences had a lifelong impact on me,” Chu says. “I heard story after story from rape and domestic violence victims. It sent chills down my spine.”

Working with victims of rape and domestic violence would continue into her work as a professor of psychology, where she taught at Los Angeles Community College for 20 years and at East Los Angeles College for 13 years. Later, she continued working for victims’ rights in government.

“I enjoyed teaching,” Chu says. “I was able to learn about the lives of so many community college students. They were students that had such a variety of circumstances. They were refugees, they were immigrants, they were the first in their families to go to college. And they certainly deserved the ability to access higher education.”

She was first elected to the Board of Education for the Garvey School District in Rosemead during her tenure as a professor. But what really spurred her into political action was the ugly anti-immigrant, English-Only movement in Monterey Park during the 1980s.

With the population growing and many new immigrants moving to the area, Chu explained, “The Safeway became the 99 Ranch Market. The eggs and bacon coffee shop became the Chinese noodle shop. There was a reaction against it. There was a movement of some residents who wanted only English on the signs in the city and only English books in the library. The last straw was when the City Council passed a resolution that English would be the only language spoken in Monterey Park.”

Chu and a number of residents formed the multiracial organization, Coalition for Harmony. By gathering enough signatures, they were able to overturn the sign ordinance and put pressure on the Council to also overturn the resolution. A fire was lit under Chu and she found another calling: politics.

She worked her way up from city politics to the national scene, from serving as the mayor of Monterey Park (three times), to serving in the State Assembly to the Board of Equalization, to becoming the first Chinese-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2009. Chu serves on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, the House Small Business Committee, and in 2011 was elected chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. She also co-founded and co-chairs the Congressional Creative Rights Caucus.



As the representative of the 27th District, which includes Pasadena and the West San Gabriel Valley, Chu has served under President Obama and now under the Trump Administration, which she sees as uneasy times. From the Muslim ban, to putting children and families who have fled violence in cages, to the anti-Asian xenophobia of calling the Coronavirus the “Chinese” virus, Representative Chu acknowledges the stoking of fear and bigotry only divides us further.

“There are those that are taking advantage of the fear out there,” Chu says. Hate crimes toward Asian Americans around the country are on the rise. In a recent Newsweek op-ed, Chu mentioned she was reminded of the times when “bullies would pull back the corners of their eyes to mock me for being Chinese when I was younger.”

Yet, Chu tries to focus on the brighter side of D.C. politics and getting things done, including helping to pass congressional bills throughout the years and the recent hundreds of bills with the new Democratic House that, unfortunately, have gone to sit in Senator Mitch McConnell’s “graveyard,” as she likes to call it.

One bill Chu is extremely proud of is H.R. 2215, the San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers and Protection Act, which she hopes will continue to protect and expand environmental protections of the jewel of the San Gabriel Valley. In 2014, President Obama signed an executive order declaring the San Gabriel Mountains a National Monument. Remember Chu’s work with rape victims? In 2009, she co-sponsored the “Justice for Survivors of Sexual Assault Act” after a scandal rocked the Los Angeles Police Department when it was discovered they had thrown out over 1,000 cold case rape kits.



Chu also works on veteran and senior issues, transportation, technology, immigration, healthcare, and many more important causes in her district and for people across the nation. What advice does she have for anyone who wants to jump into politics like herself? “I’m a huge believer of starting at the local level because I think it’s really important to understand your community and to work in your community,” Chu says. “You talk to people about the streets, the police, the fire...and they learn about you and how you are as an elected official. You get the experience you need to run for higher office.”

Representative Chu, now running for her seventh term, continues to be an inspiration in her community by working for veterans healthcare, lowering the cost of prescription drugs, expanding the Gold Line, providing clean drinking water, and preventing gun violence. She lives in Monterey Park with her husband Michael Eng, an attorney and current member of the California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board.