

2013

**GEORGIA
ASIAN AMERICAN
& PACIFIC ISLANDER
LEGISLATIVE DAY**



**2013 Georgia Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Legislative Day:
Bringing AAPI Issues to the Forefront at the Georgia Capitol**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Atlanta, Georgia, February 28, 2013 –

Nearly 200 Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) leaders from all across Georgia gathered at the State Capitol on Thursday, Feb. 28, 2013, to celebrate Georgia AAPI Legislative Day. AAPIs attending the event included representatives from the Korean, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Pakistani, Laotian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Thai, Hmong and Bhutanese communities, and hailed from as far away as Savannah. It was the largest known gathering of AAPIs at the Gold Dome to date, culminating in a group photo with Governor Nathan Deal, and Senate recognition of outstanding AAPI individuals.

The Day was organized by a Steering Committee of Georgia AAPI leaders, led by its Legislative Chair, Rep. BJay Pak (R – 108), the first Korean American elected to the Georgia General Assembly. Pak sponsored the House Bill recognizing Feb. 28, 2013 as Georgia AAPI Legislative Day. He remarked: “Diversity is of great value to the state of Georgia. Appointing more judges and government officials from different backgrounds can certainly benefit our community and the state as a whole. More professionals and small business owners from different backgrounds may be attracted to the state if they see more dynamics here.”

“The number of AAPIs in Georgia has increased by more than 83% from 2000 – 2010 according to the U.S. Census report. Elected officials should take notice that our votes matter. This day was a terrific opportunity for our voices to be heard, to inform the legislature of the concerns in our AAPI communities,” remarked Bonnie Youn, Chair of the 2013 Steering Committee and immigration attorney.

Council Member Alex Wan, the first AAPI official elected to the Atlanta City Council, in delivering his welcome address, was impressed at the turnout: “I grew up in Georgia, and I never could have imagined in my wildest dreams that I would have ever seen this many Asian Americans gathered at the Capitol in my lifetime.” Rep. Pedro Marin (D - 96), who represents the Duluth and Buford Highway Asian corridor, observed that for a majority of the participants, this was their first time at the Capitol meeting with elected officials: “Hopefully, today will plant the seed for lifelong community involvement.”

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Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp delivered the keynote Luncheon address, sharing with the audience that he is working with legislators to pass a bill amending the Georgia immigration law HB 87, to ease state licensing renewal requirements for US citizens. His office recognized that HB 87 had the unintended consequence of creating a tremendous backlog of red tape, and is affecting businesses. “We’re keeping physicians, nurses and cosmetologists from doing their jobs,” many of whom are AAPIs. Rep. Tyrone Brooks also graced the Luncheon, and praised efforts by the AAPI community to join African Americans and Latinos in the growing push for diversity in the state.

At an advocacy training session, participants listened to a panel of experts, including Judge Alvin T. Wong, State Court of DeKalb County, the first elected AAPI judge in the Southeast, Glenn Magpantay, Director of the Democracy Project at the Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund (AALDEF), Mike Vaquer, a Georgia lobbying expert, and Farooq Mughal, a policy expert and current chair of the AAPI Caucus of the Georgia Democratic Party. Magpantay shared important AAPI voter statistics gathered after the 2012 presidential elections, and Judge Wong spoke about the need for more AAPI judges. He was joined at the Luncheon by Judge Carla Wong McMillian, recently appointed by Gov. Deal to the Georgia Court of Appeals, and the first AAPI woman elected as a judge in Georgia.

Mughal emphasized the importance of re-establishing a new AAPI Commission for Georgia, as one has not been appointed after Gov. Sonny Perdue’s term in office. “A new Commission will give AAPIs a stronger voice in state government. The AAPI communities are an asset that contributes significantly to Georgia’s economy.” A task force comprised of members of the Day’s Steering Committee is currently studying the best way to position the creation of a new Commission. The task force hopes that the announcement of a new Commission may coincide with AAPI Heritage Month in May.

For more information, visit www.aapilegislativeday-ga.com.