

Asian Americans seek greater political power after shootings

By Will Weissert and Padmananda Rama
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Speaking on the floor of the Georgia state senate in mid-March, Michelle Au implored her colleagues to “stand up” to the hatred aimed at Asian Americans that’s increased during the pandemic. A day later, a gunman shook the Atlanta area by killing eight people, including six women of Asian descent.

For Au, who joined the state senate in January as its first Asian-American woman, the attack was a heartbreaking validation of her fears. It’s also spurring her and other Asian Americans to push for greater political influence in Washington and other power centers.

“People in our communities are hungry for representation that looks like them,” Au said in an interview. “I don’t think people can see problems if they haven’t lived it in the past.”

There are at least 160 Asian American and Pacific Islanders in 33 state legislatures nationwide, according to the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies. A whopping 51 of those sit in Hawai‘i’s legislature. And, out of the 535 members of congress, just 17 are of Asian or Pacific Islander descent, according to the Congressional Research Service. There are also three nonvoting delegates who are Asian American and Pacific Islanders.

President Joe Biden and his aides have been repeatedly pressed to include Asian Americans in his cabinet. Last month, two Democratic senators, Mazie Hirono of Hawai‘i and Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, threatened to oppose any upcoming nominees who don’t enhance the administration’s diversity.

“I’ve been talking to them for months and they’re still not aggressive,” Duckworth said. “I’ll be a no on everyone until they figure this out.”

Later, the two senators set aside their blockade after talks with the administration. White House press secretary Jen Psaki later announced the addition of a senior-level Asian American Pacific Islander liaison “who will ensure the community’s voice is further represented.”

Biden did pick Katherine Tai, who is Taiwanese American, as his top trade envoy. She was confirmed in March, becoming the only Asian American to hold a cabinet-level post in the new administration. Vivek Murthy, the son of Indian parents and Biden’s nominee for surgeon general, a sub-cabinet position, was also confirmed.

Many Asian Americans say feelings of being marginalized politically will take years to fully overcome. Also in March, an emotional congressional hearing cast a national spotlight on combatting racism among the community — but major legislation addressing it isn’t likely forthcoming.

“I think symbolism and representation matters, but only up to a point,” said Aarti Kohli, executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice. “What’s more important is actually doing the work.”

There are signs of change.

Kamala Harris, whose mother was born in India, is the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent to become vice president. More than 300 Asian American and Pacific Islanders ran for office up and down the ballot in 2020, according to the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies.

More appear to be preparing campaigns for the future. Madalene Xuan-Trang Mielke, the group’s president and CEO, said her organization recently held a training for people interested in joining municipal and state legislative races and had about 30 attendees. She also encourages members of the community to join local boards and commissions.

“We are subject matter experts in a wide array of industries, and we should have that be a reflection of our democracy by having people like us and others be a part of any sort of public policy conversation,” Mielke said.

Asian Americans are eyeing other major offices across the country.

In New York City, former Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang is gaining attention — and campaign cash — in a bid for mayor. And in California, home to the nation’s largest Asian-American community, elected officials are urging Democratic governor Gavin Newsom to appoint an attorney general of Asian descent as a successor to Xavier Becerra, who was picked as Biden’s health and human services secretary.

Still, Stop AAPI Hate, an activist group that formed as shutdowns related to the pandemic were taking hold across the U.S., had received nearly 4,000 self-reported incidents of bias or discrimination from all 50 states by the end of February. And nearly 3 in 10 Asian Americans said they’d been subjected to racial slurs or jokes since the



Courtesy of Michelle Au



Bill O’Leary/The Washington Post



Caroline Brehman/Pool via AP



AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki

AAPI REPRESENTATION. For Georgia state senator Michelle Au, the hatred aimed at Asian Americans that has increased during the pandemic is spurring her and other Asian Americans to push for greater political influence in Washington and other power centers. Pictured are (L-R) Michelle Au, Katherine Tai, Vivek Murthy, and Andrew Yang.

coronavirus outbreak began, according to Pew Research Center data released last summer.

Janelle Wong, the director of the University of Maryland’s Asian American Studies Program, has researched how acts of discrimination can affect political participation. She said such incidents can sometimes

alienate members of the affected community — but more often, they increase political activity.

Wong pointed to California’s stringent, Republican-backed anti-immigrant laws of the 1990s that helped mobilize Latinos to vote Democratic and turned the state

Continued on page 15



Spring Sales Event

Plan ahead for peace of mind and take advantage of *extraordinary savings* on cemetery property.

<p>Save up to 18% on cemetery prearrangements* with 0% interest for 60 months**</p>	+	<p>up to 10% on funeral prearrangements.*</p>
---	---	--

Call today to RSVP!

Your health and safety are important to us. We are observing social-distancing practices and adhering to the highest standards of cleanliness. Should our event be canceled due to COVID-19, please know that our special savings offer will still be honored. Visit our website or Facebook page for updates.

FINLEY SUNSET HILLS

MORTUARY & SUNSET HILLS MEMORIAL PARK
6801 SW Sunset Hwy. | Portland, OR 97225
503-292-6654

LINCOLN

MEMORIAL PARK & FUNERAL HOME
11801 SE Mt. Scott Blvd. | Portland, OR 97086
503-771-1117

SKYLINE MEMORIAL GARDENS

FUNERAL HOME & MEMORIAL GARDENS
4101 NW Skyline Blvd. | Portland, OR 97229
503-292-6611

Every Detail Remembered™ | **Dignity**
MEMORIAL

*Limited-time discounts valid only for prearranged funeral contracts and select cemetery property. Offer valid April 1-18, 2021. Discounts apply to new pre-need purchases only. Terms and conditions apply. See an associate for details. | **0% interest-free financing for 60 months valid only with 10% down payment. Example credit transaction for burial package: A total purchase price of \$6,900 financed with a 10% down payment and 0% APR would require 60 monthly payments of \$103.50. Offer applies only to qualifying purchases and is subject to change. Other terms and conditions apply. Contact us for more details. Offer valid April 1-18, 2021.