

COMMUNITY

KAI releases almanac of 231 Korean American elected officials, 70 years after first

2024-10-21



A nonprofit organization dedicated to studying the Korean American community has gained attention for compiling a record of Korean American elected officials.

The Korean American Institute (KAI) recently published the Korean American Political Almanac, now available online. The almanac compiles information on 231 elected officials from 1954 to the present. It includes a comprehensive list of officials, from Phillip Minn, the first Korean American elected in 1954, to the most recent official, Youbong Won-Yoon, a councilmember of Palisades Park Borough.

Phillip Minn was elected to the Hawaii Territorial Legislature in 1954, before Hawaii became a state in 1959. He served in the legislature until his death in 1966. In 1960, Alfred Hoyun Song became the first Korean American elected on the U.S. mainland as a city councilmember in Monterey Park, California. Song later served in the California State Assembly and State Senate.



From left: Philip Minn, Alfred Hoyun Song, Jay Kim, and Youbong Won-Yoon

The first Korean American elected to the U.S. Congress was Jay Kim, who served from 1993 to 1999. Since then, KAI reports that more than 230 Korean Americans have been elected to various positions, from local to federal offices, representing diverse political affiliations and states.

According to the almanac, New York has produced the highest number of Korean American elected officials, with 110, followed by California with around 50, and the Pacific Northwest states of Washington and Oregon contributing about 20.



THE KOREA DAILY

their names, offices, locations, and terms. The institute plans to expand the information to include biographical details, videos, and content about Korean American judges appointed to various courts.

Mark Keam, president of KAI and a seven-term former member of the Virginia House of Delegates, explained in a recent interview with the Korea Daily that the almanac was created to address the lack of connection among elected officials. “Many of them don’t know each other,” Kim said. “They often give speeches at Korean American events or receive awards, but that’s where it ends. I hope this almanac sparks conversations and collaboration on policy matters.”

KAI, which launched in Washington, D.C., in 2022, is still working on determining its official Korean name. President Keam, who took office earlier this year, said he plans to grow the institute into a think tank and collaborate with other Korean American organizations to promote actionable initiatives for the community.

BY YOUNGNAM KIM [kim.youngnam@koreadaily.com]

