



Voter registration is not high among Asian-Americans. With almost 400,000 residents, Queens is New York's largest Asian enclave. Yet, according to Voter Contact Service, an independent polling firm, only about 20 percent of Asians in Queens are registered to vote. A similar percentage of Asians in Chinatown are registered. By comparison, almost 30 percent of Latinos in Queens are registered.

"The Asian-American community is unique because, from the railroad builder 160 years ago to today, it did take us a longer time" to become more politically active, Young said.

But that, Young believes, will not last long.

"We're the underrepresented," she said. "But the white power structure is changing."

The story of Asian participation in New York politics stretches back almost 25 years, when those who arrived during the post-1965 immigration wave began to dabble in grassroots politics—school boards, labor unions and community voting organizations—said Madhulika Khandelwal, director of the Asian/American Center at Queens College. There were also several Council runs, she said.

"There was no successful campaign, so no one broke

"We're the underrepresented," said Assembly Member Ellen Young. "But the white power structure is changing."

through the barrier," Khandelwal said. "But there was activity."

Asian-Americans are often seen as an isolated community, removed from and unconcerned with American society, she added.

"There's this kind of divide," she said. "They're seen as 'eternal foreigners.'"

In 2001, the same year Liu was first elected, there was a spirited attempt to elect an Asian-American to the Council seat representing Chinatown. The three candidates—Margaret Chin, Rocky Chin and Kwong Hui—each got between 12 and 15 percent of the vote in the primary, far short of the almost 50 percent which made Alan Gerson the nominee.

The district, which also includes the whiter, more affluent neighborhoods of Wall Street and Battery Park City, is drawn in a way that disadvantages Asian voters, said Margaret Fung, executive director of the Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF).

Chin, a civil rights attorney who won 14 percent of the District 1 vote in 2001, said the political parties, especially the Democratic party, has not done enough to empower Asian-Americans to vote. Four out of five Asian-American voters support Democratic candidates, according to an AALDEF survey.

Chin said he would consider a future run, and he anticipates a higher Asian turnout in 2009. But he believes there is still a lot to be done regardless.

"We still have a ways to go," Chin said. "A long ways to go."

Even following Liu's historic election, Asian-American candidates have not had an easy time in the rough-and-tumble world of New York politics.

Margaret Chan, an immigration lawyer, was elected as a civil court judge in Manhattan's Second District in a slim victory in 2006. The race was marred by accusations of voter fraud, intimidation and violence.

But even before the votes were cast, Chan said she had difficulty building support in the Asian-American community.

"When I was running, I ran into problems with the petitions because people do not generally want to sign things when they do not know what they're signing," Chan said. "They'll say, 'We'll vote for you, but do we really need to sign this?'"

Liu has had no trouble getting political support or huge campaign contributions from the Asian-American community. Practically all of the 70 donors making maximum individual contributions of \$4,950 to Liu's 2009 campaign as of the July 2007 filing are Asian, as are many of the smaller contributors who have helped him build what was already then a \$2-million war chest.

While Liu generally tries to cast himself as above the racial politics fray, he acknowledged the special appeal of his prospective candidacy as he fundraises.

"The approach is always going to be shaped by the personal background and identity of the particular elected official," he said.

But he said race plays no role in his fundraising. "I don't ask people whether they're Asian or black or Hispanic or white when I accept their campaign contributions," he said.

Despite this voiced blindness to race, he said he feels he has played an important role as the Council's only Asian member, speaking for a citywide collection of communities that can sometimes be misunderstood.

"Sometimes it's not as easy for people who don't have Asian-American perspectives to take on these kinds of issues," he said.

Liu, who came to the city from Taiwan at age five but does not speak Mandarin, said he has occasionally felt the need to defend Asian-Americans across New York from discrimination.

"When I hear 'chink' I go ballistic," he said. "I can't control myself, nor do I want to."

Anticipation is high for 2009, for Liu's citywide campaign and for those of new candidates emerging from the city's Asian-American communities.

"John's really broken the mold," said Chung Seto, a political consultant who has worked with Liu for years. "It's probably easier now to train and orient Asian-Americans to run for office."

Liu is looking even further ahead, to a time when race is completely removed from electoral politics. But, he said he will never neglect his roots.

"I am Asian-American—I've been for my whole life," he said wryly. "I don't forget who I am or what I am."

New Energy Policy Critical in 2008

By Arthur (Jerry) Kremer



As chairman of the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee for 12 years and a member of the state legislature for 23, I have been personally involved in many of our state's energy issues.

While a newcomer to Albany on the Committee on Utilities, I was asked to co-author a power plant siting bill, Article X, to serve as a model for our state. The result was a sound law that met the needs of New York's business, labor and citizens, while protecting the environment.

Today as Chairman of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance (New York AREA), I devote significant time and effort working to highlight our state's need for a clean, affordable, reliable electricity supply to assure New York's economic future.

Following the 2003 blackout, New York AREA was chartered by 29 founding members. Today we can boast 150 members of the state's most significant business and labor organizations, chambers of commerce, community and environmental advocates. We see 2008 as a pivotal year for energy policy in New York, and we must seize the opportunity at the current legislative session to make sure we put the wheels of prudent energy policy in motion.

New York depends on a reliable energy supply for the well being of its populace, economy and environment. With so much at stake we must not permit legislative gridlock to stifle the passage of a new Article X, and ensure that we have sufficient electricity supply to meet tomorrow's needs.

There is no silver bullet answer for our energy and environmental goals. We must keep all options open to make sure we have the necessary generation and infrastructure.

Since New York AREA was founded, we have worked hard to raise awareness of New York's energy challenges, educate the public about energy needs, and provide opportunities for leaders to discuss the energy policies that will keep New York State the best place in the world to live. Throughout 2008 our members will advocate for a sound and meaningful energy future.

Arthur (Jerry) Kremer is Chairman of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance.

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The New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance (New York AREA) is a diverse group of business, labor, and community leaders working together for clean, low-cost and reliable electricity solutions that foster prosperity and jobs for the Empire State.

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