

Hawaii Senate Election is Historical Moment for Asian American and Pacific Islanders

By

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NEW YORK — Last night women of color across the country sent a clear and resounding message that equality and civil rights for all Americans must be protected, and those goals can only be achieved when we have representation that is reflective of our diverse communities. The election in Hawaii of Mazie Hirono to the U.S. Senate is a prime example. As the first Japanese immigrant, the [second-ever](#) woman of color to be elected to the Senate and first woman to represent Hawaii in the Senate – Hirono is making

history and forging a path for our collective future. She is joined by three strong Asian and Pacific Islander women in the U.S. House, Tammy Duckworth (IL), Grace Meng (NY), and Tulsi Gabbard (HI), and by Mark Takano (CA), the first openly gay Asian Congressman.

“This election was about women, young people, immigrants, and people of color, especially Asian American and Pacific Islanders,” said Miriam Yeung, executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum. “We voted based on the values and principles our communities live by – that all Americans deserve equality, justice, and the opportunity to build strong families and succeed.”

According to exit polls, Asian American support for President Obama increased to [73 percent](#), up from [62 percent](#) in 2008. This increase was foreshadowed in the recent National Asian American Survey that found that those who identified women’s rights, health care and education as



important issues overwhelmingly identified Obama as being closer to their views over Republican candidate Mitt Romney. Still, American political parties often overlook AAPI voters. Prior to the election, the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development found that 51 percent of Asian American voters report that they were not asked by any campaign, political party or community organization to vote or to register to vote.

Despite this fact, AAPI voters clearly stated last night that access to quality, affordable health care, including reproductive care, must be protected. Across the country, voters soundly rejected political attempts to restrict women's decision-making, including dangerous ballot initiatives that would have restricted women's ability to make personal medical decisions. In a watershed moment for equality and civil rights, voters in four states, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington voted in favor of marriage equality. And in Maryland, the passage of the DREAM Act reaffirms that Americans can and will embrace immigrants.

"The AAPI community secured important victories last night but we still have a lot of work ahead," said Yeung. "We must continue to work to ensure that women and families have access to affordable, quality health care, that we protect immigrants' rights, and that women of color continue to make gains and have a voice in leadership."