

## Person who designated March 1 Yu Gwan-sun Day in California

Also proposed Ahn Chang-ho Day, Kimchi Day and Taekwondo Day  
'I am a person of Korean blood'

The California State Senate has proclaimed Yu Gwan-sun Day. With this, both the California Senate and House of Representatives have voted to designate March 1 as Yu Gwan-sun Day.

This resolution (MR 144) was proposed by Sen. Steven Seokho Choi (age 80) (District 37), the only Korean American member of the California State Assembly, and passed unanimously on March 3.

The resolution remembers the sacred meaning of the March 1st Independence Movement, prays for Korea's development and specifies this day as a symbolic day to show the multiethnicity and diversity of California.

"When martyr Yu Gwan-sun endured severe torture after the 1919 independence movement, she said, 'No pain can compare to the pain of losing one's country,'" Sen. Choi said after the bill passed. "After her resistance, many independence fighters followed that path."

Six years ago, when he was a member of the California House of Representatives, Choi also proposed and passed a Yu Gwan-sun Day resolution.

After graduating from Kyunghee University's English Literature Department and completing his military service, Choi was selected as a Korean language instructor for the Peace Corps dispatched by the U.S. State Department and immigrated to the U.S. in 1968. As a late blooming student, he earned a doctorate in education from the University of Pittsburgh and worked as a professor at the University of Southern California (USC) and UC Irvine before starting a private academy business in 1993. He was well over 50 years old when he began to take an interest in politics.

He is a seasoned politician who has served two terms as a member of the Irvine City Board of Education, two terms as a member of the Irvine City Council, two terms as the Irvine mayor and three terms as a member of the California House of Representatives. We met in writing with Sen. Choi, who was elected as the only Korean American member of the California State Assembly in the federal Senate and House of Representatives elections held alongside the U.S. presidential election last year.



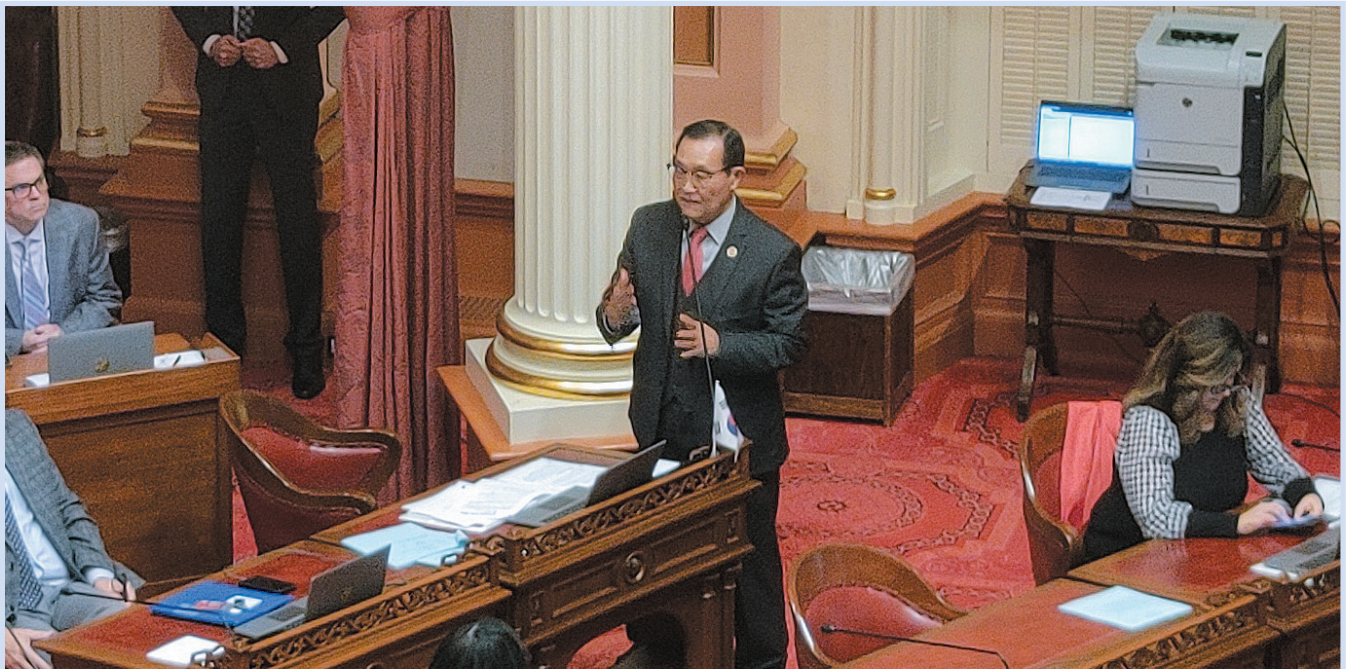
Steven Seokho Choi, a California state senator

**Although belated, please tell us how you feel about being elected as a state senator.**

I am not only the only Korean American to have been elected to the state legislature in California, which has the largest Korean population in the U.S. but also the only Asian American. I also broke the record for being the oldest person elected in California history. As a Korean American, I feel a great sense of responsibility put upon me as I stand in the position of representing Asians. Unlike when I ran, I believe that there will be a lot of interest and expectations from the Korean community now, and I will try to serve as much as I can.

**You have done a lot for the rights of Koreans in California. What is the most rewarding and memorable thing you have done?**

One bill that will have a long-lasting impact is AB 667, which passed while I was in the House. This bill, which went into effect Jan. 1, 2021, guarantees citizenship to foreign children adopted into California. The purpose is to prevent the tragedy of undocumented Korean adoptees who do not complete the necessary procedures upon entering the United States and, after turning 18, are deported to their country of origin. Citizenship is a federal matter, but the



Sen. Steven Seokho Choi gives a speech at the California State Senate on March 3, asking for support from senators while proposing a resolution on Yu Gwan-sun Day.

federal Congress has been delaying the processing of this bill for several years, so at least for children adopted into California, this bill requires that their births be registered in the county of residence within 60 days of entering the state. Next, I would think of the many resolutions related to Korea, such as Ahn Chang-ho Day, Kimchi Day, and Taekwondo Day, which have improved the status of Korea and Koreans.

**Please tell us what you think and what it means that March 1 is designated as Yu Gwan-sun Day in California.**

Through the March 1 Independence Movement, the Republic of Korea demonstrated the will and determination of Koreans who longed for independence, and the March 1 Independence Movement, which celebrated its 106th anniversary this year, became the impetus for the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea.

Martyr Yu Gwan-sun is one of the representative independence activists who peacefully resisted imperialist Japan. After the independence movement in 1919, Yu was tortured but said, “No pain can compare to the pain of losing my country.” After her resistance, many independence fighters followed her path. As a person of Korean descent, I have worked hard to promote my country and enact laws and adopt resolutions that are beneficial to not only California residents but also the Korean community in the U.S., and I plan to continue to do so in the future.

We have already commemorated Korean American Day on Jan. 13 and, in the House, passed the resolution designating March 1 as Yu Gwan-sun Day, as well as commemorating the six-year

anniversary of its first passing. We have also shown the power of Korean unity in Congress by having Korean compatriots and the consulate general attend each time. In emphasizing the need to support Yu Gwan-sun Day, we stressed that California is the state with the largest Korean population in the U.S., and Koreans have contributed greatly to the development of the state and to the diversity of California. I plan to continue such activities as these.

**Do you have any plans for other Korean-related commemorations in the future?**

I always consider the opinions and requests of Koreans, so I think more proposals will come in as time goes by. For example, “Hong Myung-ki Day,” “Jikji Day,” etc.

**What are your plans for this year and future goals?**

Similarly to when I was in the House of Representatives, I plan to work on the safety of California residents, the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, the improvement of economic security and the protection of Korean American rights.

**Please share with us any final remarks.**

From the perspective of a politician in the United States, I would like to urge you not to forget that when conducting diplomacy with a large country of 50 states like the U.S., it is very important to not only have diplomatic relations centered on Washington, D.C., but also for diplomacy at the state and city level. Even the state of California, which I represent, would rank as the world’s fifth-largest economy if it were considered an independent country. 🇺🇸