

Senator Kwan's Bio

Senator Karen Kwan, representing District 12 is a dedicated public servant with a profound commitment to her constituents and the state of Utah. With a strong background in psychology and education, Senator Kwan has spent her life striving to empower individuals and foster inclusivity. Her unique journey as the daughter of an immigrant and a descendant of a Chinese Transcontinental railroad worker has profoundly shaped her values and further fueled her dedication to education, community, and unity.

A long-term resident of Taylorsville and a respected Professor Emeritus at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Senator Kwan has deep roots in her community. Senator Kwan stands as a trailblazer, being the first Chinese American to serve in the Utah Legislature. Her legislative work began in 2016 as a House of Representatives member and leader and later led to her appointment to Utah Senate District 12 in 2023. Throughout her tenure, she has consistently advocated for progress and positive change.

Senator Kwan's academic achievements are a testament to her dedication. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a master's degree in clinical psychology, both from Pepperdine University. Her pursuit of knowledge propelled her to earn a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Utah. Senator Kwan had a distinguished career as a Professor of Psychology at SLCC, culminating in her being named the 2014 Distinguished Faculty Lecturer.

Guided by a passion for community engagement, Senator Kwan has been instrumental in multiple organizations that strive for inclusivity and social progress. She began her journey as a program assistant at the Asian Association of Utah, an organization instrumental in facilitating her entry to Utah and initiating her impactful service to the state's residents. She later assumed the role of Adviser at the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs at the University of Utah. Senator Kwan has also served on the Governor's Asian-American Council and played a foundational role in the establishment of OCA-Utah, the Asian Pacific American Advocates. In addition, she presides as the President of the Chinese Railroad Workers Descendants Association, honoring her heritage and the enduring legacy of her maternal ancestors.

As a legislator, Senator Kwan focuses on uplifting her community and advocating for equality. She's a supporter of local businesses, investing in quality education, enhancing senior care, and preserving the fundamental values that bind families together. Her legislative efforts also extend to language access and promoting equality for all Utahns, reflecting her deeply held belief in justice and fairness. Her hope is that she paves the way for a diverse array of voices in Utah's political landscape, reflecting the strength that unity in diversity brings.

Beyond her legislative role, Senator Kwan finds inspiration in her family. Alongside her husband, Travis, she is the proud parent of three daughters, two sons-in-law, and a very spoiled granddaughter.