



## HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 21, 2025

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# **Mari Watanabe Sworn in as Oregon's First Japanese American Woman Legislator**

**WASHINGTON COUNTY, Ore.** — House Democrats are proud to announce that Mari Watanabe, a third-generation Japanese American and longtime community advocate, was sworn in as the State Representative for House District 34 on Sunday, January 19, 2025, at 4 PM, at the Portland Japanese Garden.

Mari Watanabe's appointment marks a significant milestone: she became the first Japanese American woman to serve in the Oregon Legislature. Her dedication to equity, inclusion, and community-building reflects her deep-rooted commitment to public service. "My sleeves are already rolled up, they have been for decades," Watanabe shared.

### **A Journey of Resilience and Service**

Raised in the Pacific Northwest, Watanabe's journey has been shaped by the resilience her parents instilled in her as they rebuilt their lives after enduring forced internment during World War II under Executive Order 9066. This legacy of strength and purpose inspires her advocacy for the civil rights of all Oregonians.

After graduating from Washington State University, where she embraced her Japanese heritage and founded initiatives that support cultural identity, Watanabe transitioned from a successful corporate career in the apparel industry to championing diversity, equity, and inclusion in nonprofit leadership roles. Her work as Executive Director of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon and Partners in Diversity has made a lasting impact, including introducing programs like Say Hey! and workplace inclusion training for Oregon employers.

### **Event Highlight**

The overflowing room in the Jordon Schnitzer Japanese Arts Learning Center was a fitting space for Representative Watanabe as a board of trustees member. Emceed by Nadia Hasan, Beaverton City Councilor the event started off with a performance by Portland Taiko. Washington County Commissioner Nafisa Fai, and Representative Thuy Tran spoke about Watanabe's leadership. Watanabe said, "Now I have the opportunity to join the other legislators at the decision making table. I am proud. I am honored to serve as the first Japanese American woman in the state legislature."

### **A Historic Appointment**

Watanabe's selection comes after a rigorous process involving three highly qualified candidates. Her appointment was unanimously endorsed by Washington and Multnomah Counties commissioners, reflecting her broad support and proven leadership. As Multnomah County Commissioner Julia Brim-Edwards noted, "I heard from a wide variety of people who have worked with Mari Watanabe in support of her."

For photos of the swearing in of Rep. Mari Watanabe, please click [here](#).

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