

# Young politician makes history for Asian Americans

BY ROBAN JOHNSON

Thumbs up: Rep. Jeff Coleman with Pennsylvania schoolchildren and their teachers.

When Jeff Coleman ran for a seat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, there was no Plan B if his efforts failed. "I got in the race to win the race," he says. "I felt we were running a

worthy campaign based on issues." His grassroots campaigning paid off. In the 2000 election, the young Republican beat an 11-year incumbent. In November 2002, he ran unopposed, and has just begun his second term serving constituents in

his hometown of Apollo. Coleman's initial success has garnered him a place in Pennsylvania history books. At 25, he became the youngest member of the House when he first took office in 2001. He also became the first Filipino-American ever elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. "Jeff is five-star," says House Speaker Matthew Ryan. "There's hope for the country with people like him around, and I don't say that lightly."

Ryan says Coleman's initial win wasn't something the young politician

## COLEMAN BALLOT BOX

### birth date

July 4, 1975,  
Independence Day  
in U.S.A. and in  
Philippines

### education

Graduate of  
Liberty University,  
Lynchburg,  
Va., with BS in  
Government

### personal

Married the former  
Rebecca Collins, also a  
Liberty graduate, in January  
2002

### prior political experience

Observed "People Power  
Revolution" in Manila,  
Philippines

Won a seat on Armstrong  
County Republican  
Committee at age 18

Participated in and  
ran nearly two dozen  
political campaigns  
before enrolling in  
college

Served on Apollo  
Borough Council



"Jeff has set a great example to me and others that service can be a noble cause. He stands up for what he believes is right and what is best long-term for the community."

**FELLOW LEGISLATOR**  
DAVE REED

ply walked into. "To win that seat, he had to get involved," he says.

Coleman's commitment continues. To engage more people in the political process, he hosts dozens of open forums including Young Citizens Forums for teenagers, says his wife, Rebecca. "A lot of times we hear politicians condemn young people for not being involved in politics. Jeff does not do that; he encourages them to get involved and provides ways for them to do so."

Coleman's interest in introducing young people to public service is deeply rooted in his past. He was 11 and living in Manila, Philippines, when Ferdinand Marcos was overthrown after 20 years of autocratic ruling.

"I have very vivid memories from that time," says Coleman. "Marcos had lost the election, but two differ-



ent sets of results were issued."

A mass protest took place just a few miles from Coleman's

home. "Mrs. Aquino, with the help of two million people, my friends and neighbors, literally restored democracy to that country," says Coleman. "It was a very defining moment for me. It showed what one individual committed to doing what's right can accomplish."

Wanting to do what's right is what drives Coleman in his own work—a value he attributes to his parents' service as Christian missionaries. "Growing up in a missionary household has probably been the best preparation for public life and political life that I could have ever hoped for, even though it's not the typical path to political service," he says.

"All of the same fruits of the Spirit that you find in Christian teaching and Christian faith are the same principles that apply to public service," he adds. "Humility, considering others higher than yourself, an ability to adapt to situations that are new and different. Cultural barriers and other obstacles you have to overcome to reach people with your message."

"Jeff has set a great example to me and others that service can be a noble cause," says fellow legislator Dave Reed. "He stands up for what he believes is right and what is best long-term for the community."

"He's the same person in private that he is in public," adds Rebecca. "He doesn't view his work as a 9-to-5 job. It's his calling." ■



Above: Rep. Jeff Coleman and wife, Rebecca.  
Right: Rep. Jeff Coleman at swearing-in ceremony.