

He Got His Chinese Name from a Seasoned Individual in the Chinese Community

Reporter: Mike Hong / New York January 4, 2018



Caption: Peter Koo (left), Margaret Chin (right), and New City Council Speaker Zhang Sheng (Corey Johnson) have good relationships

The newly elected New York City Council Speaker Zhang Sheng (Corey Johnson) is $\frac{1}{4}$ Asian; his birth father was of Korean American mixed race. He [Corey Johnson] has a close relationship with the co-chair of the Manhattan delegation, Margaret Chin. When Margaret Chin faced a tough challenger during last year's re-election campaign, he came to Chinatown numerous times to help her. He also has a good relationship with CM Peter Koo of Flushing. He [Corey Johnson] is proud of his partial Asian blood and often joked that he wanted Peter Koo to bring him to Korea to visit. Before the election for Speaker, Zhang Sheng (Corey Johnson) sought help from a seasoned individual of the Chinese community to get a Chinese Name. They selected the elegant name Zhang Sheng. This must be his gesture of hoping to get closer to the Asian community.

On January 3, the 35 year-old Zhang Sheng became the New York City Council's youngest Speaker. At 16 years old, when he was then the star captain of his high school football team with an unlimited future, he declared that he was gay. At that

time when the tolerance for gay athlete was low, it created a big wave and he became a national news figure.

After graduating from high school, Zhang Sheng moved from Massachusetts to New York and became an advocate for the LGBT community. In 2011, he was elected a member of Manhattan's Community Board 4, making history as New York City's youngest CB Member. He successfully won the City Council District 3 seat when then City Council Speaker Christine Quinn was termed out. He became the Chair of the Council's Health Committee in his first term.

In his speech on January 3, Zhang Sheng (Corey Johnson) described his humble beginning, facing significant life challenges since childhood. A few tears fell when he described how he didn't have the resources to support his mother. Zhang Sheng mentioned that he is ¼ Asian; his birth father was a Korean American biracial orphan. He came to America when he was adopted by an American family. He [Corey Johnson] came out of the closet in his teens and declared that he was gay. He had suffered from depression and almost committed suicide. He was subsequently diagnosed as HIV positive. During the Speaker election on January 3, many of his supporters praised Zhang Sheng for being indomitable for overcoming unimaginable challenges in his life. Hence he achieved a major victory today.

Jenny Low, [former] Board Chair of the Chinese-American Planning Council, who helped select Zhang Sheng for him, said that his smile and bright eyes left a deep impression each time she saw him. When he was running for City Council Speaker, he needed to broaden his connection with all the different communities in New York City, and he ask her to help select a Chinese name to get closer to the Chinese and Asian communities. Jenny Low said when looking for a phonetic translation of Johnson, she found Sheng, and felt that this character is a perfect fit for him. Sheng is pronounced that same way as the character for "victory". Jenny Low said the definition of Sheng 「晟」 is brightness of the sun; it means splendor, which conveys a very good connotation.

[Translated by Jenny Low]