

Impact Players

Lee Wan-koo

By Andy Lim

Who is he?

Representative Lee Wan Koo is the new prime minister of the Republic of Korea.

Representative Lee previously served as the floor leader of the Saenuri Party since May 2014. A three-term lawmaker, Rep. Lee most recently represented the constituency of Buyeo-Cheongyang in South Chungcheong province. He first entered public service in 1974 and during his time in the civil service he has served as Chief of Police for both North and South Chungcheong provinces. Rep. Lee's political career began in 1996, when he won a seat in the 15th National Assembly as a member of the New Korea Party, a predecessor to the Saenuri and Grand National Parties. He also won a seat in the 16th National Assembly in 2000 as a member of the Alliance for Free Democrats Party before taking a brief hiatus from politics in 2004, where he was a visiting professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. He returned to politics in 2006 as the Governor of South Chungcheong province before resigning from office in December 2009 over opposition to then-President Lee Myung-bak's intention to change plans for Sejong City. Rep. Lee once again returned to politics when he successfully won a seat in the National Assembly as a member of the Saenuri Party in the 2013 by-election for the Buyeo-Cheongyang constituency. Rep. Lee graduated with a B.A. in political science from Sungkyunkwan University and a M.A. in criminal justice from Michigan State University.

Why has he been in the news?

Representative Lee was confirmed by the National Assembly in a vote of 148 to 128 on February 16. He underwent his nomination hearings before the National Assembly on February 10-11. He was chosen by President Park on January 23, 2015 during a partial reshuffle of her Cabinet and presidential aides to replace Prime Minister Chung Hong-won. This makes Rep. Lee her third nominee to replace Prime Minister Chung, who had offered to resign to take responsibility for the Sewol ferry tragedy last April. Her two previous nominees, Ahn Dae Hee and Mong Chang-geuk both dropped out of their respective confirmations after public outcries over their controversial past. In his press conference accepting his nomination, Rep. Lee vowed to "restore discipline in the government, strengthen communication with the opposition parties and the public and speak frankly to Park (President)."

What can we expect from him?

As the new prime minister, Rep. Lee brings to his office a good reputation as a compromiser who can handle divisive partisan issues. His successful track record negotiating difficult bills in the National Assembly is a good testament to his ability to work with the opposition. Many lawmakers on both side of the aisle credit his mediation skills and leadership for the passage of the controversial special compensation bill for the victims of the Sewol ferry incident. As the prime minister, he will not only have to deal with the National Assembly, including the new leader of the opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) Moon Jae-in, but also with his own party, led by chairman Rep. Kim Moo-sung and his successor, floor leader Rep. Yoo Seong-min.



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