

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Elijah E. Cummings

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MARYLAND

1996–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Elijah E. Cummings, a Baltimore native, has represented his hometown in public office for three decades. A seven-term veteran of the U.S. House of Representatives, Representative Cummings has been an advocate for issues affecting his predominantly African-American district. He gained national prominence as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), and in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) he is chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation.

Elijah Eugene Cummings was born on January 18, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was one of seven children of Robert and Ruth Cummings.¹ He graduated from Baltimore City College High School in 1969 and went on to Howard University, where, as a member of Phi Beta Kappa, he earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1973. At Howard, Cummings served as the sophomore class president and as the student government president. In 1976, he graduated with a J.D. degree from the University of Maryland School of Law. He founded his own law firm in Baltimore shortly after graduation—a practice he would continue until being elected to Congress two decades later. Cummings first entered public office when he won election to the Maryland house of delegates in 1982, where he served for 14 years. He represented a predominantly African-American district in southern West Baltimore. He served as vice chairman of both the constitutional and administrative law committee and the economic matters committee. In the state legislature, Cummings chaired the legislative black caucus and eventually became the first African American in Maryland history to be named speaker *pro tempore*—the house of delegates' second-highest position.

When five-term Representative Kweisi Mfume resigned from his Baltimore, Maryland-based seat in February 1996, Cummings entered the race to succeed the incumbent. The district was a crescent shaped area extending from poor and affluent

areas in the center of Baltimore through a number of poor black communities on the western side of the city. It also encompassed the middle-class towns of Catonsville and Randallstown. Since 1971, the district had been represented by an African American, beginning with Representative Parren Mitchell, Maryland's first black Member of Congress. Despite the fact that 26 other candidates entered the crowded Democratic primary, Cummings's status in the state house of delegates, his ties to the community, and key endorsements by local politicians and the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspapers quickly made him a favorite. He won the primary with 37 percent of the vote, defeating his nearest rival by 13 percentage points.² He easily won election against Republican Kenneth Kondner in the April 16 special election, garnering 81 percent of the vote. Cummings later said that he hoped "to be the voice of those people who put their faith and trust in me. Hopefully, I will build a record . . . that reflects that goal."³ In his subsequent six re-election campaigns, Cummings was never seriously challenged, winning 73 percent or more of the vote in the general elections. In his 2006 re-election campaign, Cummings faced no party-endorsed competition in the general election.⁴

When Representative Cummings was sworn in to office in April 1996, he was assigned to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee (later renamed Oversight and Government Reform) and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He has served on both panels during his entire congressional tenure. He also serves on the Committee on Armed Services and the Joint Economic Committee.⁵

During the 110th Congress, Representative Cummings has sponsored initiatives to improve homeland security, increase access to college, promote access to quality, affordable health care, provide seniors with affordable prescription drugs, and ensure a high quality of life for veterans. He is also committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality education, specifically through the reauthorization and full funding of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Representative Cummings serves on numerous boards and commissions. He is spearheading an effort to strengthen the maritime curriculum at the Maritime Academy in Baltimore. He also serves on the U.S. Naval Academy Board of Visitors, the Morgan State University Board of Regents, the Maryland Zoo Board of Trustees, the Baltimore Aquarium Board of Trustees, the Baltimore Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America Board of Directors, and the Yale-Howard Nursing Partnership Center to Reduce Health Disparities by Self and Family Management Advisory Committee. He is an active member of New Psalmist Baptist Church.

FOR FURTHER READING

"Cummings, Elijah Eugene," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodyisplay.pl?index=C000984>.

NOTES

- 1 "Elijah E. Cummings," *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 24 (Detroit, MI: Gale Group, 2000).
- 2 Rachel Van Dongen, "The Next Special: To Succeed Mfume, Cummings Looks Like Frontrunner," 22 February 1996, *Roll Call*; Paul W. Valentine, "32 Hopefuls Seek Mfume Post," 25 February 1996, *Washington Post*: B5; Todd Spangler, "Maryland Lawmaker, Dental Technician Nominated for Mfume Seat," 6 March 1996, Associated Press.
- 3 Paul W. Valentine, "Welcome to Capitol Hill; Freshman Congressman Laments Effort Spent on Partisan Bickering," 24 April 1997, *Washington Post*: M1.
- 4 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 473.