

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM GEORGIA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Sanford Bishop served 16 years in the Georgia state legislature before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. As an eight-term veteran of Congress, Representative Bishop now serves on the prestigious Appropriations Committee. While focusing on military and veterans issues, as well as on agricultural legislation important to his southwest Georgia district, Bishop has championed federal fiscal responsibility.

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., was born on February 4, 1947, in Mobile, Alabama, to Sanford D. Bishop, Sr., and Minnie S. Bishop. His father served as the first president of the Bishop State Community College; his mother was the college librarian.¹ He served as student body president at Morehouse College in Atlanta, graduating in 1968 with a bachelor of arts degree in political science. Bishop served in the U.S. Army, joining the ROTC and completing basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was honorably discharged in 1971, the same year he earned his J.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Bishop initially worked as a private practice lawyer who specialized in civil rights cases. In 1976, he won election to the Georgia state house of representatives, representing a district that covered Columbus. He served there for 14 years before winning election to the Georgia senate in 1990. In the state legislature, Bishop helped establish the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity and the state's office of child support receiver.² He is married to Vivian Creighton Bishop, and they have a daughter, Aayesha J. Reese.

Backed by the Columbus business community in 1992, Bishop was one of five challengers to run against six-term incumbent Representative Charles F. Hatcher in the Democratic primary. The district encompassed much of southwestern Georgia, including portions of Columbus, Macon, Albany, Valdosta, and Fort Benning, the state's largest military installation. Reapportionment, at the urging of the U.S. Justice Department, made the district the state's third majority-black district in 1992.³ In the primary, asserting that he represented "a new generation of leadership,"

Bishop forced Hatcher into a runoff before defeating the incumbent with 53 percent of the vote in a head-to-head contest.⁴ Bishop ran in the general election as a consensus builder. “For too long we have focused on things that divide us, black versus white, rural versus urban,” he said. “But throughout the district, people have the same concerns—affordable health care, safe streets, and good jobs.”⁵ In the general election, he defeated Republican Jim Dudley with 64 percent of the vote.

Bishop has won election to seven additional terms, despite court-ordered redrawing of his district in the mid-1990s. In 1995, a federal court ruled that the borders of his district were the result of an unconstitutional “racial gerrymander.” Subsequent redistricting placed Columbus in a neighboring congressional district, reducing the African-American portion of Bishop’s constituency from 52 to 39 percent.⁶ In the newly configured and competitive district, Bishop won re-election in 1996 with 54 percent of the vote. In 2000, in his narrowest re-election margin, Representative Bishop defeated GOP candidate Dylan Glenn, an African American and former Senate aide, with 53 percent of the vote. Reapportionment following the 2000 Census put a large section of Muscogee County back into his district and increased the black portion of the population to 44 percent. Since then, Bishop has won with large majorities, including in 2006, when he defeated Republican Bradley Hughes with 68 percent of the vote.⁷

When Bishop was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he received assignments to three committees: Agriculture, Post Office and Civil Service, and Veterans’ Affairs. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), the Post Office and Civil Service panel was subsumed under the new Government Reform Committee, and Bishop left that assignment. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), after he left his Veterans’ Affairs post, Representative Bishop received an assignment to the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he relinquished all of his committee assignments to serve on the exclusive Appropriations Committee. He currently serves on three Appropriations subcommittees: Defense, Agriculture, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

In the House, Representative Bishop has developed a reputation as a moderate Democrat who cosponsored constitutional amendments to balance the budget, to ban flag desecration, and to allow voluntary prayer in public schools.⁸ From his seat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Bishop worked with House leaders to steer through the House a major farm bill that increased funding for farm support programs, including those for peanut production, a major agriculture industry in his district. Bishop also has strongly supported the defense budget, looking out particularly for veterans’ issues from his seat on the Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee for Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies and its Subcommittee on Defense.⁹

FOR FURTHER READING

“Bishop, Sanford Dixon, Jr.,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000490>.

NOTES

- 1 “Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.,” *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 24 (Detroit, MI: Gale Group, 2000); *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 285.
- 2 *Almanac of American Politics, 2000* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 1999): 463.
- 3 *Politics in America, 1994* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993): 396–397.
- 4 “Democratic Congressman Loses in Georgia,” 12 August 1992, *New York Times*: A16; Bill Montgomery, “Bishop Touts ‘Progressive’ Image in Push to Topple Hatcher,” 4 August 1992, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*: E1.
- 5 Bill Montgomery, “Contrasts Mark Campaign; Political Novice Faces Veteran Lawmaker in 2nd District,” 20 October 1992, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*: E3.
- 6 *Politics in America, 2006*: 285.
- 7 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html; *Politics in America, 2006*: 285.
- 8 “Official Biography of Sanford Bishop, Jr.,” http://bishop.house.gov/display.cfm?content_id=4 (accessed 8 February 2006); *Politics in America, 2006*: 284.
- 9 “Official Biography of Sanford Bishop, Jr.,” http://bishop.house.gov/display.cfm?content_id=4 (accessed 11 October 2007); *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 277.