

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

William L. Clay, Jr.
1956–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MISSOURI

2001–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Hailing from one of Missouri's most influential political families, Lacy Clay won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2000, succeeding his father, William (Bill) Clay, Sr., a three-decade House veteran. In Congress, Clay has focused on liberal issues ranging from protection of voting rights to creating economic development opportunities for minorities. "Although I am not my father, I am my father's son, in that we share the same values . . . and commitment to principles, such as fairness and justice," Clay once said.¹

William Lacy Clay, Jr., was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 27, 1956, one of three children raised by William and Carol Ann Clay. His father, William, Sr.—a union representative and St. Louis alderman—won election to the U.S. House in 1968, where he served 32 years and was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. His uncle, Irving, held several executive positions in St. Louis city government before being elected an alderman. Lacy Clay spent his teenage years in suburban Maryland, graduating with the class of 1974 from Springbrook High School in Silver Spring. He served as an assistant doorkeeper in the U.S. House of Representatives, working his way toward a bachelor of science degree in government and politics, which he earned in 1983 at the University of Maryland, College Park. "I didn't originally want to go into politics. I wanted to do something like own a business," Clay once recalled. "But I realized after working in Washington and the U.S. Congress that that was an option for me."² After graduating from college, Clay returned to St. Louis to run in a special election for a vacant seat in the Missouri house of representatives. He served as a state representative until 1991, when he was elected to the Missouri senate.³ He also has served as a Missouri Democratic National Committeeman since 1992. Clay and his wife, Ivie Lewellen Clay, have two children: Carol and William III.

In 1999, when William Clay, Sr., announced his retirement from the U.S. House, Lacy Clay was an immediate favorite to succeed his father in a district that encompassed northern St. Louis and a large area of the city's suburbs in St. Louis County. During the election, Clay invoked his paternal connection to Congress: "For 32 years, your congressman has been Congressman Clay," he told voters. "I certainly hold him up as my hero. He is the one I look to; he is the one who has taught me what I need to know in this business."⁴ In the August 2000 Democratic primary, he won convincingly against a field of contenders that included a popular St. Louis County councilman. In the general election, Lacy Clay easily carried the heavily Democratic district, with 75 percent of the vote. His colleagues in the Democratic freshman class elected him president of their group.⁵ "It's an honor for me to succeed my father," Clay said on election night. "I certainly am looking forward to hitting the ground running, working on behalf of working families."⁶ In his subsequent three re-election campaigns in 2002, 2004, and 2006, Clay won with 70, 75, and 72 percent of the vote, respectively.⁷

When Representative Clay was sworn in to the House in January 2001, he was assigned to the Financial Services and Government Reform committees. He has served on both panels since then and currently serves as chairman of the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives for the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. On the Financial Services Committee, Clay serves on two subcommittees: Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit and Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade, and Technology.⁸

During his congressional career, Representative Clay has focused primarily on two issues: voting rights and economic development. He has been an outspoken advocate of electoral process reform, weighing in on issues ranging from electronic voting, to expansion of voter registration, to campaign finance reform. On economic issues, Representative Clay has pushed for expanded access to credit to stimulate home ownership among low-income families. He has cosponsored measures to eliminate predatory lending practices by financial institutions.⁹ Clay also has stressed constituent services. "That's what I really get pleasure out of—serving people," he said. "I make sure my employees understand that we are here because of the people and we have to serve them and we have to do a good job serving them."¹⁰

FOR FURTHER READING

"Clay, William Lacy, Jr.," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C001049>.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 578.
- 2 Gregory B. Freeman, "The Clays: A Missouri Dynasty," 19 January 1992, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch Magazine*: 8.
- 3 *Politics in America, 2008*: 578; "Congressman William 'Lacy' Clay Biography," <http://www.house.gov/clay/biography.htm> (accessed 6 September 2005).
- 4 D. J. Wilson, "Hand-Me-Down District," 19 July 2000, *Riverfront Times*.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 576.
- 6 Mark Schlinkmann, "Lacy Clay Wins 75 Percent of the Vote in Bid to Succeed His Father in Congress," 8 November 2000, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: 6.
- 7 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 8 "Subcommittee Assignments for the 110th Congress," <http://financialservices.house.gov/subassignments.html>; "Committees," <http://lacyclay.house.gov/committees.htm> (both sites accessed 28 November 2007).
- 9 *Politics in America, 2004*: 576–577; "The Federal Home Loan Bank System," Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, House, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (29 January 2003): E100; "A New Direction at St. Louis Housing Authority," Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 1st sess. (14 June 2001): E1109; "Congressman William 'Lacy' Clay, Biography."
- 10 David Scott, "Observers Say Missouri's 1st District Likely to Stay in Clay's Hands," 18 June 2002, Associated Press.