

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

*Jesse Jackson, Jr.*  
*1965–*



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE  
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

1995–

The son of one of the foremost civil rights activists of the 20th century, Jesse Jackson, Jr., won his first campaign for elective office when he prevailed in a special election to represent a U.S. House district that stretched across South Chicago and outlying communities. From his seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, Jackson has focused on improving the economy of his largely suburban district and attending to key national issues such as voting reform and health disparities.

Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., was born in Greenville, South Carolina, on March 11, 1965, the second of five children of Jesse, a civil rights activist, and Jacqueline Davis Jackson. He attended Le Mans Academy, a private military preparatory school, and graduated high school from St. Albans School in Washington, DC. Jackson graduated in 1987 with a bachelor of science degree in business management from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Two years later, he earned an M.A. in theology from the Chicago Theological Seminary. In 1993, he completed his J.D. at the University of Illinois–Chicago College of Law. After earning his law degree, Jackson served two years as national field director of the Rainbow Coalition, a political organization founded by his father. Jackson's wife, Sandi, whom he married in 1991, currently serves as an alderman for Chicago's 7th Ward. The couple have two children: Jessica Donatella and Jesse L. Jackson III.<sup>1</sup>

In 1995, Jackson announced his intention to run for the U. S. House seat vacated by incumbent Representative Mel Reynolds of Illinois. The district, which included much of Chicago's South Side and a swath of suburbs toward the south, was 69 percent black according to the 1990 Census. It was economically diverse, with rich and poor neighborhoods, abandoned steel mills, and tract suburban housing.<sup>2</sup> Jackson won the Democratic special primary on November 29, 1995,

with 48 percent of the vote, against Emil Jones and Alice Palmer, Illinois state senators.<sup>3</sup> In the special election on December 13, 1995, Jackson defeated his Republican opponent, former Chicago Heights police officer Thomas Somer, by a nearly three-to-one margin. Jackson was sworn in the following day, as Representative Sidney Yates from a nearby North Side Chicago district—then the longest-serving Member of the House—introduced him on the floor.<sup>4</sup> In his six re-election bids, Jackson has never been seriously challenged, winning majorities of between 89 and 94 percent of the vote.<sup>5</sup>

Jackson received an assignment on the Banking and Financial Services Committee when he joined the 104th Congress (1995–1997). In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Jackson received an additional post on the Small Business Committee. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), he left both panels after securing an exclusive post on the Appropriations Committee, which originates all federal spending bills. During the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Jackson serves as the second-ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs and the fourth-ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. He also serves on the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies.

Every Congress, Representative Jackson introduces several constitutional amendments for the right to vote, the right to a high quality education, and the right to high quality health care. He also wrote the legislation that will place a statue of civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks in National Statuary Hall in the Capitol. From his seat on the Appropriations Committee, Representative Jackson was the driving force in increasing the funding for the Minority HIV/AIDS initiative from \$166 million in 1998 to more than \$400 million currently, and he has consistently led the fight to increase funding for historically black schools for medical and health professions. He also directed the effort to create the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health in 2001.

Representative Jackson has also been successful in obtaining humanitarian aid for sub-Saharan African countries, securing \$500 million in emergency humanitarian and peacekeeping assistance for the Darfur region of Sudan in 2005 and \$50 million in emergency humanitarian assistance for Liberia in 2006. For his district, Jackson has secured hundreds of millions of dollars for job training, health care, education, transportation and infrastructure projects, and has championed the construction of a third Chicago-area airport south of his district to foster economic development.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

“Jackson, Jesse L., Jr.,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000283>.

#### NOTES

- 1 “Official Biography of Representative Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.” <http://www.house.gov/jackson/Bio.shtml> (accessed 27 June 2007).
- 2 Don Terry, “In House Election, A Familiar Name,” 24 November 1995, *New York Times*: A20; *Politics in America, 1994* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993): 457–458.
- 3 Benjamin Sheffner, “His Last Name Proves Golden for Jesse Jackson Jr., Who Wins Big in Special Primary for Reynolds Seat,” 30 November 1995, *Roll Call*.
- 4 Dirk Johnson, “Victory His, Jesse Jackson Jr. Heads to Congress,” 14 December 1995, *New York Times*: B17; “Jesse Jackson, Jr. Sworn in as House Member,” 15 December 1995, *New York Times*: A38; Mitchell Locin, “GOP Won’t Challenge Jackson in 2nd District,” 6 September 1996, *Chicago Tribune*: 1.
- 5 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at [http://clerk.house.gov/member\\_info/electionInfo/index.html](http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html).