

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

*Gwendolynne S. (Gwen) Moore*  
1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE  
DEMOCRAT FROM WISCONSIN

2005–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

In 2004, Gwen Moore won election as the first African American to represent Wisconsin in Congress. A state legislator and community activist with more than two decades of experience, Moore emerged as an advocate for urban issues: affordable housing, education, and access to health care. “I am really in sync with people who struggle on a day to day basis,” said Moore, a single mother who once relied on welfare to help pay bills. “You don’t have to have a ‘D’ after your name to understand that people have to eat.”<sup>1</sup>

Gwendolynne S. (Gwen) Moore was born in Racine, Wisconsin, on April 18, 1951, the eighth of nine siblings. Her father was a factory worker, and her mother was a public school teacher. As an expectant single mother on welfare, she went to college with the help of TRIO, a program that provided educational aid to low-income Americans. Moore earned a B.A. in political science from Marquette University in 1978. In 2000, she earned a certificate for senior executives in state and local government from Harvard University. After college, Moore worked for VISTA, helping to spearhead community projects such as the start-up of a local credit union, and eventually being awarded the prestigious VISTA Volunteer of the Decade award as a result of her accomplishments. She worked for years as a housing and urban development specialist. In 1988, she entered elective politics, winning a seat in the Wisconsin house of representatives. Four years later, Moore became the first African-American woman elected to the Wisconsin senate.<sup>2</sup> Moore is the mother of three children: Jessalynne, Sowande, and Ade.<sup>3</sup>

When 11-term incumbent Democrat Gerald D. Kleczka announced his plan to retire at the end of the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Moore entered the 2004 primary as the front-runner. The district encompassed the entire city of Milwaukee and several of its surrounding suburbs. Although heavily Democratic, it was relatively new, the result of reapportionment after the 2000 Census that merged two distinct parts of the city for the first time. Moore fended off a stiff challenge from two prominent Democrats—a state senator and a former state Democratic Party chairman. The candidates agreed largely on the central issues, but the campaign reflected geographical and racial divisions highlighted during the city’s mayoral contest: The African-American population lives on the north side in largely black

neighborhoods, while a significant community of Polish and Eastern European descent lives on the south side in largely white neighborhoods. Moore's base of support among African Americans, mobilized by the mayoral race, proved decisive. She won the three-way primary with 64 percent of the vote.<sup>4</sup> In the general election, backed by African Americans, women, and progressives, Moore easily defeated Republican challenger Gerald Boyle, an Iraq War veteran, 70 to 28 percent. On election night she told reporters, "I really want people to remain engaged around the issues that brought this coalition together. We've got to come to a conclusion with this war. We've got to preserve life, preserve resources and start focusing on a domestic agenda that's going to relieve us of a dearth of jobs, a lack of health care and a divestment in educational opportunities."<sup>5</sup> In her 2006 re-election bid, Representative Moore defeated Republican Perfecto Rivera with 71 percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

When Moore took her seat in the 109th Congress (2005–2007), she received assignments on the Financial Services and Small Business committees. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Moore won a coveted seat on the influential Budget Committee.

During Representative Moore's freshman term, provisions from the SHIELD Act, which she authored, were included in the reauthorization of the landmark Violence Against Women Act. Moore's legislation provided for measures to ensure that domestic violence abusers cannot track their victims through a federal database that centralizes information on homeless persons who receive public assistance.<sup>7</sup>

Moore's committee assignments largely reflect her interest in economic issues, which she believes constitute "one of the next frontiers in the fight for civil rights."<sup>8</sup> Representative Moore has focused on many of the same issues she emphasized as a community activist and a state legislator. Among her legislative interests have been bills preventing predatory lending in minority communities, providing affordable housing, and ensuring that federal contracts are awarded equitably to minority-owned businesses. In her first term, she also secured an amendment to help public-housing recipients build up the credit record necessary for homeownership if they made timely rent payments.<sup>9</sup> Her interest in the effects of economic globalization led to her being asked to serve on the worldwide Parliamentary Network of the World Bank.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

"Moore, Gwendolynne S. (Gwen)," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M001160>.

#### NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 1110–1111, quotation on 1110.
- 2 "Official Biography of Congresswoman Gwen Moore," <http://www.house.gov/gwenmoore/bio.shtml> (accessed 11 September 2007).
- 3 Katherine M. Skiba, "Washington Notebook: Moore Counts on Experience of Many Former Kleczka Aides," 9 January 2005, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: A13.
- 4 *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2005): 1823.
- 5 Larry Sandler, "Moore Rewrites History; Mainstream Appeal Makes Her State's First Black Congresswoman," 3 November 2004, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: A1; see also Larry Sandler and Leonard Sykes, Jr., "A Race in Which Race Didn't Matter," 4 November 2004, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: B1.
- 6 "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).
- 7 "Official Biography of Congresswoman Gwen Moore."
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Politics in America, 2008*: 1110.