

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Kendrick B. Meek
1966–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM FLORIDA

2003–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

In 2003, Kendrick Meek's election in a Florida district formerly represented by his mother, Carrie Meek, made him one of a handful of African-American Members of Congress to succeed a parent directly. A veteran of state politics, Meek won key assignments on the Armed Services Committee and the House Select Committee on Homeland Security and served as Florida's lone Representative on the powerful Ways and Means Committee.¹

Kendrick Brett Meek was born in Miami, Florida, on September 6, 1966, the youngest of three children raised by Carrie Pittman Meek. Carrie Meek was divorced as a young mother but went on to build a political career in the Florida state legislature and, eventually, as a Member in the U.S. House of Representatives. Kendrick Meek graduated with a bachelor of science degree in criminology from Florida A&M University in 1989. After college, Meek worked for the Florida highway patrol, eventually earning the rank of captain, and for a time guarding Democratic Lieutenant Governor Kenneth Hood (Buddy) McKay. In 1994, Meek won election to the Florida state house of representatives, where he served four years before winning election to the state senate. During that time, he also worked for one of the country's largest private security firms. Meek married the former Leslie Dixon, and they raised two children, Lauren and Kendrick, Jr.

When Carrie Meek, a five-term, 76-year-old veteran of the House, announced her retirement in July 2002, Kendrick was the immediate favorite to succeed her.² The district, which weaved through southeast Broward County and northeast Miami-Dade County, was majority African-American and heavily Democratic. Kendrick Meek entered the Democratic primary as the sole candidate. For much of the campaign season, Meek led a citizen initiative to reduce the size of classes in Florida's public schools, which voters eventually passed during a fall

2002 referendum.³ He also pushed a legislative agenda that included economic development, improved social services, and criminal justice initiatives. “I’m here to represent, ‘We the People,’” Meek said. “Someone has to know what’s going on and stand up for the rights of regular folks.”⁴ In the fall general election, Meek received no major party opposition and ran in large part on the basis of his mother’s nearly iconic reputation in the district.⁵ His election also made him just the second son to succeed his mother directly in Congress. He was sworn in to the 108th Congress (2005–2007) in January 2003 with his mother looking on. “I am very respectful of the fact that the reason I am able to assume this high office today is because of the sacrifices and struggles and the battles for equal rights that were fought by the generations that preceded me,” Meek said.⁶ In his 2004 and 2006 re-election campaigns, he ran unopposed in the general election.⁷

Since his freshman term, Representative Meek has served on the Armed Services Committee. Meek also served on the Homeland Security Committee for two terms, rising to the position of Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Management, Integration, and Oversight—which has jurisdiction over airport and seaport security; customs operations; aid to local and state governments; and immigration inspections, detention, and enforcement policies. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Meek was appointed to the Ways and Means Committee and retained his Armed Services Committee seat. He also earned a spot on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. In January 2007, Meek was appointed to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, an interparliamentary organization of legislators representing NATO Members and associate countries. He is one of only 12 members of Congress to represent the United States on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Meek also serves as chairman of the board of directors of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.⁸

Meek noted that his mother’s work on the Appropriations Committee informed his sense that policy and money were intertwined. “I believe the way we appropriate sets the priorities for America,” Meek said. “That’s where all our principles and all our values start, where we put our money.”⁹ To that end, Meek has worked to ensure that minority firms have had access to contracting opportunities for the billions of federal dollars now spent on terrorism and homeland security operations.¹⁰ Representative Meek also has used his seat on the Armed Forces Committee to push to better equip troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. His top domestic priorities include health care, particularly the fight against HIV/AIDS; strengthening diversity within the senior corps of the military; and Haitian immigration.¹¹

FOR FURTHER READING

“Meek, Kendrick B.,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodyisplay.pl?index=M001148>.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 251.
- 2 Andrea Robinson and Tyler Bridges, “Carrie Meek to Retire,” 7 July 2002, *Miami Herald*: A1; Lauren Whittington, “Family Planning: Late Retirement Doesn’t Always Mean Victory for Offspring,” 11 July 2002, *Roll Call*.
- 3 “Official Biography of U.S. Rep. Kendrick B. Meek,” <http://kendrickmeek.house.gov/biography.shtml> (accessed 3 December 2007); see also Jason T. Smith, “Meek One Step Closer to Congress,” 24 July 2002, *Miami Times*: 1A.
- 4 Andrea Robinson, “Kendrick Meek Set to Fulfill a Legacy,” 2 January 2003, *Miami Herald*: A1.
- 5 Shortly after being sworn in to Congress, Meek said, “People say, ‘How do you feel being in the shadow of Carrie Meek?’ I say the shade is *mighty* comfortable.” See Betsy Rothstein, “Some New Members Arrive in Unique Manner,” 8 January 2003, *The Hill*: 11.
- 6 “U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek Takes Office in Historic Capitol Ceremony,” *Broward Times*, 10 January 2003.
- 7 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 8 “Biography of U.S. Rep. Kendrick B. Meek”; *Politics in America, 2008*: 251.
- 9 *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 250; see also Starla Vaughns Cherin, “State Senator Kendrick Meek Runs for United States Congress,” 17 July 2002, *Westside Gazette*: 1.
- 10 “Spotlight on Meek at CBC Conference,” 17 September 2003, *Miami Times*: 1A.
- 11 See, for example, *Congressional Record*, House, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (3 March 2004): H809–810; *Congressional Record*, House, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (24 February 2004): H531; Kendrick B. Meek, “Strength in Diversity,” 19 November 2007, *Army Times*.