

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Eddie Bernice Johnson

1935–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM TEXAS

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

A nurse by training, Eddie Bernice Johnson was also a political veteran decades before coming to Congress in the early 1990s. In 1972, Johnson became the first African American to hold a Dallas-area political office since the Reconstruction Era, after winning election to the state legislature. Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, Johnson has attained a high-ranking seat on the Science and Technology Committee, and a subcommittee chairmanship on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and has chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) while stressing the need for minority inroads in the fields of science and technology.

Eddie Bernice Johnson was born in Waco, Texas, on December 3, 1935, the daughter of Lee Edward Johnson and Lillie Mae (White) Johnson. She graduated from A.J. Moore High School in Waco in 1952. In 1955, she received a nursing diploma from Holy Cross Central School of Nursing in South Bend, Indiana. Eddie Bernice Johnson married Lacey Kirk Johnson a year later. Before they divorced in 1970, the couple had one son, Kirk. Johnson graduated in 1967 with a B.S. from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. She later became the chief psychiatric nurse of the Veterans Administration hospital in Dallas. In 1976, Johnson earned an M.S. in public administration from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Johnson has three grandchildren: Kirk, Jr., David, and James.

Eddie Bernice Johnson first became involved in elective politics at the state level. She was elected as a Democrat to the Texas state legislature in 1972, becoming the first African-American woman from the Dallas area ever to hold public office. As a member of the Texas legislature, she chaired the labor committee, becoming the first woman in Texas history to lead a major committee in the statehouse. In 1977, President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter appointed her as a regional director for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, a post she held until 1981. After a six-year hiatus from politics, Johnson won election to the state senate, eventually serving as chair of the redistricting committee.

Following the Texas reapportionment of 1992, Johnson ran for the newly created U.S. House seat, which encompassed much of the Dallas and Irving area. She was elected as a Democrat with 72 percent of the vote. In 1996, court-ordered redistricting changed the boundaries of the Texas district, reducing the percentage of minority voters. Nevertheless, Johnson was re-elected with 55 percent of the vote. In her subsequent five re-election campaigns, Johnson won comfortably. In 2006, she won re-election to the 110th Congress (2007–2009) with 80 percent of the vote.¹

Johnson has served on two committees since her House career began in January 1993: Transportation and Infrastructure and Science and Technology. In the 110th Congress, Johnson was appointed to serve as chairwoman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment. She also serves as a senior deputy whip.²

Representative Johnson's legislative interests have had both a local and a national focus. As a former nurse, Johnson has called attention to the problems facing the country's health care system and Medicare program. In 2002, she voted against a Republican-backed prescription drug plan. She also has been a proponent of a bill that called for increased federal funding for research into osteoporosis, or bone density deficiency. From her seat on the Science and Technology Committee, Representative Johnson also has pushed for a program to encourage schoolchildren to study science and math.

Johnson used her Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Science and Technology Committee positions to look out for the economic interests of her district. Early in her career, Johnson supported the North American Free Trade Agreement, recognizing the fact that much of Dallas's business revolves around exports to Mexico. She later voted for normalizing trade relations with China, arguing that it would bring business to the Dallas–Fort Worth area. In 1998, she received a post on the Aviation Subcommittee of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, an important position since her district covers part of the Dallas–Fort Worth International Airport. Johnson has helped bring federal money for transportation improvements and also has supported the production of B-2 stealth bombers, which are manufactured in her district.

During her House career, Johnson has been an active member of the CBC. As chair of the organization in the 107th Congress (2001–2003), she attempted to steer the CBC toward building coalitions with business groups in addition to its traditional reliance on labor and civil rights organizations. Representative Johnson also pushed the group to hold its first summit conferences on technology and energy.³

FOR FURTHER READING

"Johnson, Eddie Bernice," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000126>.

NOTES

- 1 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 2 "About Eddie Bernice Johnson," http://www.house.gov/ejjohnson/about_ebj/index.shtml (accessed 4 December 2007).
- 3 *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 1008.