



★ PART TWO ★

Current Black-American Members

★ INTRODUCTION TO ★

Profiles of Current Members

Nearly 140 years ago, Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi and Representative Joseph Rainey of South Carolina became the first of 121 African Americans to serve in the U.S. Congress.* The history of African Americans in Congress contains many of the same themes that resonate in the larger chronicle of American democracy: a pioneering spirit, struggle, perseverance, gradual attainment of power, advancement through unity, and outstanding achievement.

The 42 African Americans (39 Representatives, two Delegates, and one Senator) who are serving in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) are the inheritors of that long historical legacy extending back to Revels and Rainey. One of the largest groups of black legislators to serve in the history of the institution (8 percent of the lawmakers in both chambers), these African Americans account for more than one-third of all the blacks who have ever served in Congress. All of them were sworn in to Congress after 1964, and the majority first took office in the 1990s.

The biographical profiles of these current Members, like those of their predecessors, contain information on pre-congressional careers, first House or Senate campaigns, committee and leadership positions, and legislative achievements. But because these Members are incumbents, comprehensive accounts of their congressional careers must await a later date. Current Members were given the opportunity to review their profiles before the book was published. At approximately 750 words each, these profiles are about half as long as those of most former Members. Also, these profiles are arranged alphabetically rather than chronologically. The profiles in this section are of the 38 African Americans who have served for two or more Congresses. The four freshman Members of the 110th Congress are profiled in a résumé format in Appendix A.

Among the current Members who are profiled in this section is Representative John Conyers, Jr., of Michigan, who had 43 years of congressional service as of January 2008. First sworn in to Congress in 1965, Conyers is the longest-serving African American in congressional history and one of the 15 longest-serving Members in House history. Also included in this section are profiles of Representative James Clyburn of South Carolina, one of only two African Americans ever to hold one of the top-three leadership positions in the House, and Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, currently the only African-American Senator.

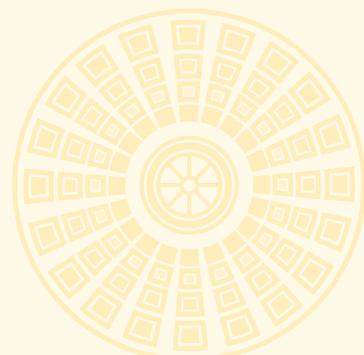
As incumbent Members retire, we will expand their profiles to include a more complete account of their congressional careers. As these members leave Congress, their profiles in the online version of *Black Americans in Congress*—<http://baic.house.gov>—will be updated to reflect these individuals' contributions to the rich history of African Americans in Congress.

*The total reflects the number who had served in Congress up to the closing date for this volume on December 31, 2007.

KEY TO MEMBER TITLES



★ SENATOR ★



★ REPRESENTATIVE ★



★ DELEGATE ★

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM GEORGIA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Sanford Bishop served 16 years in the Georgia state legislature before winning election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. As an eight-term veteran of Congress, Representative Bishop now serves on the prestigious Appropriations Committee. While focusing on military and veterans issues, as well as on agricultural legislation important to his southwest Georgia district, Bishop has championed federal fiscal responsibility.

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., was born on February 4, 1947, in Mobile, Alabama, to Sanford D. Bishop, Sr., and Minnie S. Bishop. His father served as the first president of the Bishop State Community College; his mother was the college librarian.¹ He served as student body president at Morehouse College in Atlanta, graduating in 1968 with a bachelor of arts degree in political science. Bishop served in the U.S. Army, joining the ROTC and completing basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was honorably discharged in 1971, the same year he earned his J.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Bishop initially worked as a private practice lawyer who specialized in civil rights cases. In 1976, he won election to the Georgia state house of representatives, representing a district that covered Columbus. He served there for 14 years before winning election to the Georgia senate in 1990. In the state legislature, Bishop helped establish the Georgia Commission on Equal Opportunity and the state's office of child support receiver.² He is married to Vivian Creighton Bishop, and they have a daughter, Aayesha J. Reese.

Backed by the Columbus business community in 1992, Bishop was one of five challengers to run against six-term incumbent Representative Charles F. Hatcher in the Democratic primary. The district encompassed much of southwestern Georgia, including portions of Columbus, Macon, Albany, Valdosta, and Fort Benning, the state's largest military installation. Reapportionment, at the urging of the U.S. Justice Department, made the district the state's third majority-black district in 1992.³ In the primary, asserting that he represented "a new generation of leadership,"

Bishop forced Hatcher into a runoff before defeating the incumbent with 53 percent of the vote in a head-to-head contest.⁴ Bishop ran in the general election as a consensus builder. “For too long we have focused on things that divide us, black versus white, rural versus urban,” he said. “But throughout the district, people have the same concerns—affordable health care, safe streets, and good jobs.”⁵ In the general election, he defeated Republican Jim Dudley with 64 percent of the vote.

Bishop has won election to seven additional terms, despite court-ordered redrawing of his district in the mid-1990s. In 1995, a federal court ruled that the borders of his district were the result of an unconstitutional “racial gerrymander.” Subsequent redistricting placed Columbus in a neighboring congressional district, reducing the African-American portion of Bishop’s constituency from 52 to 39 percent.⁶ In the newly configured and competitive district, Bishop won re-election in 1996 with 54 percent of the vote. In 2000, in his narrowest re-election margin, Representative Bishop defeated GOP candidate Dylan Glenn, an African American and former Senate aide, with 53 percent of the vote. Reapportionment following the 2000 Census put a large section of Muscogee County back into his district and increased the black portion of the population to 44 percent. Since then, Bishop has won with large majorities, including in 2006, when he defeated Republican Bradley Hughes with 68 percent of the vote.⁷

When Bishop was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he received assignments to three committees: Agriculture, Post Office and Civil Service, and Veterans’ Affairs. In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), the Post Office and Civil Service panel was subsumed under the new Government Reform Committee, and Bishop left that assignment. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), after he left his Veterans’ Affairs post, Representative Bishop received an assignment to the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he relinquished all of his committee assignments to serve on the exclusive Appropriations Committee. He currently serves on three Appropriations subcommittees: Defense, Agriculture, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

In the House, Representative Bishop has developed a reputation as a moderate Democrat who cosponsored constitutional amendments to balance the budget, to ban flag desecration, and to allow voluntary prayer in public schools.⁸ From his seat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Bishop worked with House leaders to steer through the House a major farm bill that increased funding for farm support programs, including those for peanut production, a major agriculture industry in his district. Bishop also has strongly supported the defense budget, looking out particularly for veterans’ issues from his seat on the Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee for Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies and its Subcommittee on Defense.⁹

FOR FURTHER READING

“Bishop, Sanford Dixon, Jr.,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodesisplay.pl?index=B000490>.

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- 3 *Politics in America, 1994* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993): 396–397.
- 4 “Democratic Congressman Loses in Georgia,” 12 August 1992, *New York Times*: A16; Bill Montgomery, “Bishop Touts ‘Progressive’ Image in Push to Topple Hatcher,” 4 August 1992, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*: E1.
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- 9 “Official Biography of Sanford Bishop, Jr.,” http://bishop.house.gov/display.cfm?content_id=4 (accessed 11 October 2007); *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 277.

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Corrine Brown
1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM FLORIDA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

In 1992, Corrine Brown became one of the first African Americans elected to the U.S. House from Florida since the Reconstruction Era. During her House career, from her seats on the Transportation and Infrastructure and the Veterans' Affairs committees, Representative Brown regularly brought federal programs into her Jacksonville district and earned a reputation as a tireless advocate of civil rights.¹

Corrine Brown was born in Jacksonville, Florida, on November 11, 1946, and grew up in the city's Northside neighborhood, graduating from Stanton High School. As a single mother, she raised a daughter, Shantrel. She earned a bachelor of science degree at Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University in 1969 and an M.A. from the same institution in 1971. In 1972, Brown graduated with an Ed.S. degree from the University of Florida. She taught at the University of Florida and Edward Waters College before settling at Florida Community College in Jacksonville, where she taught and served as a guidance counselor from 1977 to 1992. Her close friend and political mentor, Gwen Cherry, was the first African-American woman elected to the Florida house of representatives. Cherry's death in a 1979 car crash prompted Brown to enter elective politics. In 1980, she was a delegate for presidential candidate Senator Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy at the Democratic National Convention. Two years later, Brown won a seat in the Florida legislature, where she served for a decade.

In 1992, reapportionment created a new district in northeastern Florida spanning the area from Jacksonville to Orlando. Brown won the Democratic nomination and ran a general election campaign that focused on improving the district's educational system, bringing more jobs to the area, and protecting Social Security and Medicare for the elderly. She won by 18 percentage points, making her one of three Florida candidates elected that year (including Alcee Hastings and Carrie Meek) who were the first African Americans to represent the state since Reconstruction. In her subsequent seven re-election campaigns, Brown won by comfortable margins. In 2006, she was elected to her eighth term without opposition.²

When Representative Brown took her seat in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she received assignments on the Government Operations Committee, the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and the Public Works and Transportation Committee (later named Transportation and Infrastructure). In the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she resigned from Government Operations. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Brown serves as chairwoman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials. She also serves as the second-ranking Democrat for the Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health.³ Brown also has served as vice chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and is a member of the Women’s Caucus.

Brown’s primary focus is on improving the economy within her district, steering federal funds and projects into the north Florida region. She led the effort to construct an \$86 million federal courthouse in Jacksonville, while using her influence on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to initiate Florida rail projects to meet the state’s booming transportation needs. While supporting reduction of the federal deficit by cutting welfare programs, Brown believed the system must be made “more advantageous for welfare recipients to get off welfare” by providing jobs and job training. “We must make sure that changes in the welfare system do not inadvertently hurt children,” she added.⁴

Brown also supported military defense spending, in part reflecting the large military presence in her district, most notably the Jacksonville Naval Air Station. But Brown wanted more of the money to flow into personnel training, describing the military as a place where working-class Americans could find opportunities unavailable elsewhere. From her seat on the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Brown was particularly attentive to the needs of women veterans and health issues. After the 2000 elections, Brown was one of the most vocal advocates for voting reforms. To improve the voting process, especially in minority precincts, Representative Brown supported the Help America Vote Act of 2002 to streamline balloting procedures and provide money to modernize voting systems as a first step toward reform.⁵

Brown’s interests extend beyond her congressional district. In 1993, she began working behind the scenes to push the William J. (Bill) Clinton administration to restore a democratic government in Haiti by installing deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. She also urged officials to process the thousands of Haitians who arrived in the United States seeking political asylum.⁶ Brown also has taken up the cause of Liberians, pushing to extend temporary visa status for thousands who came to America after a civil war in the African country during the early 1990s.

FOR FURTHER READING

“Brown, Corrine,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000911>.

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- 4 “Candidates’ Forum,” 6 November 1994, *Orlando Sentinel*: G7.
- 5 Conference Report on H.R. 3295, Help America Vote Act of 2002, *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (10 October 2002): 7836.
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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

G. K. Butterfield
1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NORTH CAROLINA

2004–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

After serving for more than 15 years as a North Carolina judge, including a term on the state supreme court, G. K. Butterfield won a 2004 special election to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Re-elected to the 109th Congress (2005–2007) less than four months later, Representative Butterfield secured prominent committee assignments from which he tended to the agricultural and small business interests of his district.

George Kenneth (G. K.) Butterfield was born on April 27, 1947, in Wilson, North Carolina. His father, George Kenneth Butterfield, won a seat on the Wilson city council in the 1950s—making him one of a handful of African Americans to hold political office in the state since Reconstruction. Town officials later changed the election format to deprive the senior Butterfield and all black candidates of a chance to win further elections. “I saw how the political system was manipulated to obtain an unfair result,” the younger Butterfield recalled. “Having seen that injustice has made me want to be involved politically.”¹ Butterfield served two years in the U.S. Army as a personnel specialist, from 1968 to 1970, before graduating from North Carolina Central University in 1971 with a bachelor’s degree in sociology and political science. Three years later he earned a J.D. from North Carolina Central University and commenced private law practice. Butterfield later went on to serve as president of the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers, filing several successful voting rights lawsuits. In November 1988, he won election to the North Carolina superior court, where he served for 12 years. In 2001, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley appointed Judge Butterfield to the North Carolina supreme court, where he served for two years. In 2002, Butterfield lost his re-election bid and was subsequently appointed special superior court judge. Butterfield is divorced, with two daughters, Valeisha and Lenai.

In 2004, when incumbent Representative Frank Ballance announced his retirement from the U.S. House, Butterfield was nominated by local Democrats to run in the special election.² The district, which covered large swaths of eastern North Carolina, is solidly Democratic and largely rural and poor and is one of two majority-black congressional districts in the state. Butterfield ran on a platform that promised more federal dollars to help small business development revitalize the local economy. He noted, “[W]e need to understand the role that small business plays in economic development and I think that’s where the congressperson can be really valuable.”³ On July 20, 2004, Butterfield won the special election with 71 percent of the vote against Republican challenger Greg Dority, to serve out the remainder of the term in the 108th Congress (2003–2005). Both men also won simultaneous primary elections for the full term in the 109th Congress. In November 2004, three times as many voters went to the polls, and Butterfield again prevailed against Dority with a 64 percent majority.⁴ Representative Butterfield faced no opposition in his 2006 re-election.

Representative Butterfield was sworn in to office on July 21, 2004. “The people of the First District are no different from your constituents,” Butterfield told his colleagues afterward in a floor speech. “They want our government to work to enable all people to experience the American dream.”⁵ He received assignments on the Agriculture and Small Business committees. He retained the Agriculture Committee assignment in the 109th Congress, but resigned from the Small Business panel to accept a seat on the Armed Services Committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Butterfield gave up these assignments for a seat on the Energy and Commerce Committee, where he serves as vice chair of the Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality. He also serves on the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. Butterfield is one of eight Chief Deputy Whips, making him the first Democrat from North Carolina to serve in this position.⁶

One of Representative Butterfield’s chief legislative aims has been to improve the economy of his district by reducing unemployment and bringing federal money to help small businesses in northeastern North Carolina. Representative Butterfield’s assignment to the Agriculture Committee was important to the region’s farm-based economy, particularly tobacco farmers. In late 2004, he backed a federal buyout program for tobacco producers that eventually passed the House. From his seat on the Armed Services panel, Butterfield has opposed a navy plan to build a test airstrip where naval aviators could conduct more than 30,000 practice flights per year. He objected to the navy’s site selection process and was successful in eliminating the appropriation for the project.⁷

FOR FURTHER READING

“Butterfield, George Kenneth, Jr., (G. K.)” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B001251>.

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- 2 Lauren W. Whittington and Erin P. Billings, “Embattled Ballance Retiring,” 10 May 2004, *Roll Call; Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 759–760.
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- 4 Cindy George, “Former Justice Wins 1st District; Butterfield Fills Ballance’s Seat,” 21 July 2004, *News and Observer*: A16; Holmes, “Butterfield Wins Special Election; Will Face Dority in November”; “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 5 *Congressional Record*, House, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (21 July 2004): H6497.
- 6 *Politics in America, 2006*: 759; *Politics in America, 2008*: 743–744; “About G. K. Butterfield,” <http://butterfield.house.gov/aboutgk.asp> (accessed 17 October 2007).
- 7 *Politics in America, 2006*: 759.

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Donna M. Christensen

1945–

DELEGATE

DEMOCRAT FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

1997–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Delegate Donna M. Christensen won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1997, the first woman to represent the U.S. Virgin Islands, a multi-island territory in the eastern Caribbean. The islands became part of the United States when they were purchased from Denmark in 1917. Since 1973, the territory has had nonvoting representation in the House of Representatives.¹ During her tenure, Christensen has focused on improving the social, political, and economic dynamics of the islands, especially as they relate to federal issues.

Donna Christensen was born on September 19, 1945, to the late chief judge of the Virgin Islands District Court, Almeric Christian, and Virginia Sterling Christian. She earned a bachelor of science degree from St. Mary's College at Notre Dame in 1966 and an M.D. from George Washington University School of Medicine in 1970. In addition to running an active family practice, Christensen worked as a health administrator, rising to the position of assistant commissioner of health for the Virgin Islands.

Concurrently, she began her political career in 1980 as part of the Coalition to Appoint a Native Judge, which emphasized judicial appointments from within the community, and later on as part of the Save Fountain Valley Coalition, which called for the protection of St. Croix's north side from overdevelopment. She served as Democratic National Committeewoman from 1984 to 1994, as vice chair of the Territorial Committee of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, and as a member of the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Committee. From 1984 to 1986, she served as a member of the Virgin Islands Board of Education and was appointed to the Virgin Islands Status Commission from 1988 to 1992.

Christensen lost her first bid for Delegate to Congress in 1994, failing to secure the Democratic nomination. Two years later, she not only won the party's nomination, but also went on to defeat freshman Independent incumbent Victor Frazer after a three-way general election and a runoff election. In 1997, as a Member of the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she became the first female physician to serve in the House. Christensen has since won re-election to the House with at least 62 percent of the vote.²

As a Member of the House, she has served on the Natural Resources Committee, which oversees the affairs of the offshore territories, where she is chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs and the third-ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands. She has also served on the Small Business Committee and, during the 108th Congress (2003–2005), gained a seat on the Committee on Homeland Security, primarily because of her expertise in public health.

Christensen has focused on strengthening the Virgin Islands' economy and stabilizing its fiscal condition. Expanding traditional tax incentives that are central to the economy of the Virgin Islands and introducing legislation to encourage fiscal discipline have been the hallmarks of her tenure. She also has worked to expand business, housing, health, and educational opportunities in the territory.

Delegate Christensen, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, chairs the Health Braintrust and has been at the forefront of efforts to end health disparities, fight the HIV/AIDS threat both nationally and internationally, and extend health insurance coverage to as many Americans as possible.

Delegate Christensen is married to Christian O. Christensen of St. Croix and has two daughters from a previous marriage, Rabiah and Karida Green, and three grandchildren, Nia Hamilton, Kobe George, and Nealia Williams.³ She has four stepchildren from her 1998 marriage to Christian O. Christensen: Lisa, Esther, Bryan and David.

FOR FURTHER READING

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★ 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

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Emanuel Cleaver II

1944–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MISSOURI

2005–

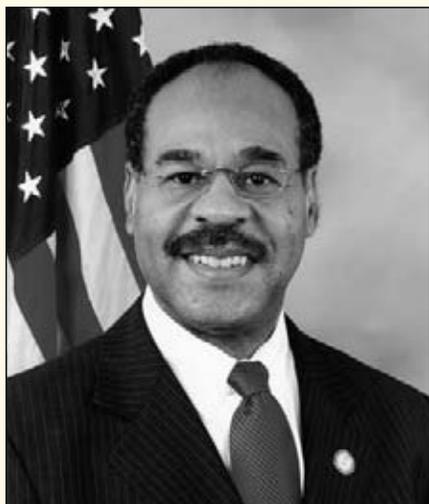


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

As a former Kansas City mayor and city councilman, Emanuel Cleaver II entered Congress with a reserve of political experience not customary for the typical U.S. House freshman Member. During his first term, Representative Cleaver earned a seat on the exclusive Financial Services Committee and focused on the needs of his Kansas City-based district.

Emanuel Cleaver II was born in Waxahachie, Texas, on October 26, 1944. He and his family lived in a small wooden house that had been a slave cabin. His family's religious roots—his great-grandfather, grandfather, and an uncle were preachers—inspired him to a life of ministry.¹ He graduated from high school in Wichita Falls, Texas, before earning a bachelor of science degree in sociology from Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, Texas, in 1972. Two years later, Cleaver graduated with a master's degree in divinity from the St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. Cleaver served as an ordained Methodist minister for a central Kansas City congregation (he still serves as senior pastor at St. James United Methodist Church). Cleaver and his wife, Dianne, a psychologist, have four children and three grandchildren.

Cleaver, who had been active in the 1960s civil rights movement, entered elective politics in 1979, successfully campaigning for a seat on the Kansas City city council. He served there until 1991, acting as mayor *pro tempore* and chairing the council's planning and zoning committee.² He won election as Kansas City mayor, becoming the first African American to hold that post. Cleaver served as mayor for eight years, focusing on job growth and economic development. His success earned him the distinction of being chosen the two-term president of the National Conference of Black Mayors. After he left office in 1999, Cleaver worked as a radio talk show host.

In December 2003, when five-term Democratic Representative Karen McCarthy announced she would not run for re-election in 2004, Cleaver sought the nomination for the vacant seat. “The surest path to happiness has always come when I became consumed in a cause greater than myself,” Cleaver said when announcing his candidacy. “Serving in Congress at such a time as this is that great cause.”³ The district covered portions of Kansas City and some of its eastern suburbs. A majority of constituents were middle-class and Democratic, and the party had controlled the seat since before the New Deal. Cleaver turned back a spirited challenge by Jamie Metzler, a former White House Fellow and National Security Council aide. He won the August 3, 2004, primary with 60 percent of the vote.⁴ In the general election, he faced Republican candidate Jeanne Patterson, a businesswoman and political newcomer. Patterson spent nearly \$3 million of her own money during the campaign, arguing that she would bring more jobs to the city. Cleaver stressed his accomplishments as mayor, including his successful efforts to bring major corporations to the city.⁵ In the general election, he prevailed over Patterson by 55 to 42 percent of the vote, with the remainder going to a Libertarian candidate. African Americans accounted for just 24 percent of the district population—the smallest black population of any district represented by a black Member of Congress.⁶ In 2006, Cleaver was re-elected with 64 percent of the vote.⁷

When Representative Cleaver was sworn in to the House in January 2005, he received an assignment on the Financial Services Committee. He currently serves on two of that panel’s subcommittees: Investigation and Oversight and Housing and Community Opportunity. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Cleaver joined the new Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming. He also serves as a regional whip for the Democratic Caucus and as second vice chairman for the Congressional Black Caucus.⁸

Representative Cleaver has focused on many of the issues that were highlighted in his initial campaign. He has advocated federal dollars for improved education programs and affordable health care coverage. Arguing that he is in accord with voters’ sentiments in northern Missouri, Cleaver opposes the continued presence of U.S. military forces in Iraq.⁹ Among the measures that Representative Cleaver introduced during his freshman term was a bill to condemn the use of “racially restrictive covenants” in housing documents that sought to prohibit the sale or lease of property to racial or ethnic minorities, in violation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Another bill he authored condemned the Government of Mexico for producing postage stamps with Memin Pinguin, a comic book character from the 1940s that evoked racist Jim Crow-Era cartoons of blacks.¹⁰

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James E. Clyburn

1940–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

James E. (Jim) Clyburn's 1992 election made him the first African American from South Carolina to serve in Congress since the late 19th century. Representative Clyburn has won re-election to seven additional terms, serving as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and winning a seat on the influential House Appropriations Committee. On November 16, 2006, the House Democratic Caucus unanimously elected Clyburn Majority Whip, making him the first South Carolinian and the second African American to ascend to the third-ranking position in the House.¹

James E. Clyburn was born in Sumter, South Carolina, on July 21, 1940, the eldest of three sons of Enos L. Clyburn, a minister, and Almeta Clyburn, a beauty shop operator. At age 12, he was elected president of the Sumter youth chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. A client of his mother's once warned him against giving voice to his early political aspirations in the segregated South. "We knew what the rules were. I mean, a 12-year-old black kid talking about being in politics and government?" Clyburn recalled of that formative moment. "She was just telling me, 'Son, be careful, you can't have those kinds of dreams—you're not the right color.'"² He attended Mather Academy, a private all-black high school. Clyburn graduated from South Carolina State College in 1961 with a bachelor of arts degree. During the 1950s and 1960s, he organized sit-ins at an Orangeburg, South Carolina, five and dime store and was arrested and jailed for his participation in nonviolent civil rights protests.³ During one such protest he met his future wife, the former Emily England; they have three grown daughters: Mignon, Angela, and Jennifer. Clyburn taught history in high school before working on several federal employment programs. From 1968 to 1971, he was the executive director of the South Carolina state commission for farm workers. In 1970, Clyburn ran an unsuccessful campaign for the state house of representatives, but his candidacy caught South Carolina Governor John West's attention. He joined Governor West's staff in 1971 and, three years later, was appointed head of the state commission for human affairs (the first black gubernatorial appointee in the state in more than seven decades). Clyburn lost campaigns for South Carolina secretary of state in 1978 and 1986.⁴

In 1992, at the recommendation of the U.S. Justice Department, statewide redistricting created a majority-black district in eastern South Carolina. It was a sprawling district encompassing all or part of 16 counties as well as parts of the cities of Charleston, Columbia, and Florence. The five-term incumbent Democrat, Robert (Robin) Tallon, retired, and Clyburn captured the Democratic nomination with 56 percent of the primary vote against four opponents. In the general election, he easily defeated Republican candidate John Chase with 65 percent of the vote.⁵ Clyburn is a distant relative of George Washington Murray, the last African American to represent South Carolina in the U.S. House (1893–1895, 1896–1897).⁶ In his subsequent seven re-election campaigns, Clyburn won with between 64 and 73 percent of the vote. In 2006, he defeated Republican Gary McLeod with a 64 percent majority.⁷

As a new Representative, Clyburn proved to be a pragmatic, enthusiastic, and effective behind-the-scenes player, moving rapidly into the leadership ranks.⁸ Elected co-president of the Democratic freshman class, he won assignments on the Public Works and Transportation Committee (later named Transportation and Infrastructure) and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He later served as Ranking Member of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation. He accepted an additional assignment with the Small Business Committee for a term in the 104th Congress (1995–1997). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Representative Clyburn won a seat on the exclusive Appropriations Committee.⁹ He has served on that panel since. The CBC also unanimously chose Clyburn as its chairman in that Congress, making him just the second southerner to lead the group.¹⁰ At the start of the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Clyburn's Democratic colleagues elected him Vice Chairman of the Democratic Caucus. He served in that post until he was elected Chairman of the Democratic Caucus during the 109th Congress (2005–2007).

As a Member of the House, Representative Clyburn has focused on issues important to his agricultural and low income district and the African-American community generally. He has been a strong supporter of education, seeking increased federal funding for historically black colleges in his district. He opposed efforts to overhaul the Social Security system and to dismantle affirmative action programs and has advocated a higher minimum wage and universal health care coverage. "There is no separation between the defense of our nation and the nutrition for our children," Clyburn once said. "There is no difference between the defense of our nation and a strong, educated work force."¹¹

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

John Conyers, Jr.

1929–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MICHIGAN

1965–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Representative John Conyers is the longest-serving African American in congressional history. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Representative Conyers heads a panel that has oversight over the Department of Justice and the federal courts as well as jurisdiction over copyright, constitutional issues, consumer protection, and civil rights.

John Conyers, Jr., was born in Detroit, Michigan, on May 16, 1929, the eldest of four sons of John and Lucille (Simpson) Conyers. His father was a United Auto Workers representative. John, Jr., attended Detroit public schools, graduating from Northwestern High School in 1947. He served in the National Guard from 1948 to 1950 before enlisting as a U.S. Army private for four years. Conyers attended officer candidate school and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He was assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers in Korea, where he served in combat for a year. In 1954, Conyers left active duty with an honorable discharge, serving three more years in the Army Reserves. In 1957, using the GI Bill's educational benefits, Conyers earned a bachelor of arts degree from Wayne State University and, a year later, an L.L.B. from Wayne State Law School. After graduating, Conyers joined the staff of Michigan Representative John Dingell, Jr. From 1958 to 1961, he served as Dingell's legislative assistant. After passing the Michigan bar in 1959, he cofounded the law firm of Conyers, Bell & Townsend. In 1961, Michigan Governor John B. Swainson appointed him as a referee for the Michigan workmen's compensation department, and he also worked as general counsel for several labor union locals. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy appointed Conyers to the National Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, which promoted racial tolerance in the legal profession. In 1967, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference chose him as the recipient of the Rosa Parks Award, presented by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Conyers married Monica Ann Esters in June 1990. They have two sons: John III and Carl.¹

Conyers's first political interests developed during the mid-1950s while he was a college student, when he joined the Young Democrats and served as a precinct official for the local Democratic Party. In late 1963, he ran for a newly reapportioned U.S. House seat that had been drawn from two districts that had covered Detroit. The new district encompassed middle- and upper-middle-class sections of the city, with a predominantly African-American population, and included Conyers's childhood neighborhood. Local Democratic Party officials refused to support him in the primary, arguing that the 35-year-old was too young and lacked experience in elective office. Conyers ran anyway, supported by a large volunteer force at the precinct level. With the campaign slogan "Jobs, Justice, and Peace," he defeated the party-backed candidate, Richard H. Austin, by a slim margin of 45 votes.² In the heavily Democratic district, Conyers easily won the general election with 84 percent of the vote. In his subsequent 20 successful re-election campaigns for his House seat, Conyers has never been seriously challenged, winning his general elections by a minimum of 82 percent of the vote. In 2006, Conyers won re-election with 85 percent of the vote against Republican Chad Miles.³

Upon taking his seat in the House in January 1965, Conyers won a coveted assignment on the Judiciary Committee—becoming the first African American ever to serve on that panel. He has served there ever since. In 1995, Representative Conyers became Ranking Member and, when the Democrats regained control of the House in 2007, Conyers was named chairman. He has served on two other panels: Government Operations, from the 92nd through the 103rd Congresses (1971–1993), and Small Business (1987–1993). Conyers chaired the Government Operations Committee from 1989 until early 1995, when the Republicans won control of the House. He is one of only a handful of black Members of Congress to chair multiple standing committees.

Representative Conyers played a leading role in the passage of major legislation during his four-decade career. Among the measures he helped pass are the Help America Vote Act (2002), the Violence Against Women Act (1994), the Motor Voter Bill (1993), the Jazz Preservation Act (1987), and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday Act (1983). He was one of the 13 founding Members of the Congressional Black Caucus. At the start of the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Conyers began his 42nd year of House service, making him the second-longest-serving House Member (behind fellow Michigan Representative John Dingell, Jr.) and one of the 25 longest-serving Members in congressional history.⁴

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Elijah E. Cummings

1951–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MARYLAND

1996–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Elijah E. Cummings, a Baltimore native, has represented his hometown in public office for three decades. A seven-term veteran of the U.S. House of Representatives, Representative Cummings has been an advocate for issues affecting his predominantly African-American district. He gained national prominence as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), and in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) he is chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation.

Elijah Eugene Cummings was born on January 18, 1951, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was one of seven children of Robert and Ruth Cummings.¹ He graduated from Baltimore City College High School in 1969 and went on to Howard University, where, as a member of Phi Beta Kappa, he earned a bachelor's degree in political science in 1973. At Howard, Cummings served as the sophomore class president and as the student government president. In 1976, he graduated with a J.D. degree from the University of Maryland School of Law. He founded his own law firm in Baltimore shortly after graduation—a practice he would continue until being elected to Congress two decades later. Cummings first entered public office when he won election to the Maryland house of delegates in 1982, where he served for 14 years. He represented a predominantly African-American district in southern West Baltimore. He served as vice chairman of both the constitutional and administrative law committee and the economic matters committee. In the state legislature, Cummings chaired the legislative black caucus and eventually became the first African American in Maryland history to be named speaker *pro tempore*—the house of delegates' second-highest position.

When five-term Representative Kweisi Mfume resigned from his Baltimore, Maryland-based seat in February 1996, Cummings entered the race to succeed the incumbent. The district was a crescent shaped area extending from poor and affluent

areas in the center of Baltimore through a number of poor black communities on the western side of the city. It also encompassed the middle-class towns of Catonsville and Randallstown. Since 1971, the district had been represented by an African American, beginning with Representative Parren Mitchell, Maryland's first black Member of Congress. Despite the fact that 26 other candidates entered the crowded Democratic primary, Cummings's status in the state house of delegates, his ties to the community, and key endorsements by local politicians and the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspapers quickly made him a favorite. He won the primary with 37 percent of the vote, defeating his nearest rival by 13 percentage points.² He easily won election against Republican Kenneth Kondner in the April 16 special election, garnering 81 percent of the vote. Cummings later said that he hoped "to be the voice of those people who put their faith and trust in me. Hopefully, I will build a record . . . that reflects that goal."³ In his subsequent six re-election campaigns, Cummings was never seriously challenged, winning 73 percent or more of the vote in the general elections. In his 2006 re-election campaign, Cummings faced no party-endorsed competition in the general election.⁴

When Representative Cummings was sworn in to office in April 1996, he was assigned to the Government Reform and Oversight Committee (later renamed Oversight and Government Reform) and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. He has served on both panels during his entire congressional tenure. He also serves on the Committee on Armed Services and the Joint Economic Committee.⁵

During the 110th Congress, Representative Cummings has sponsored initiatives to improve homeland security, increase access to college, promote access to quality, affordable health care, provide seniors with affordable prescription drugs, and ensure a high quality of life for veterans. He is also committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality education, specifically through the reauthorization and full funding of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Representative Cummings serves on numerous boards and commissions. He is spearheading an effort to strengthen the maritime curriculum at the Maritime Academy in Baltimore. He also serves on the U.S. Naval Academy Board of Visitors, the Morgan State University Board of Regents, the Maryland Zoo Board of Trustees, the Baltimore Aquarium Board of Trustees, the Baltimore Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America Board of Directors, and the Yale-Howard Nursing Partnership Center to Reduce Health Disparities by Self and Family Management Advisory Committee. He is an active member of New Psalmist Baptist Church.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Artur Davis
1967–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM ALABAMA

2003–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Hailing from a poor Montgomery, Alabama, neighborhood, Artur Davis used his academic prowess to earn two Harvard degrees and to launch a political career that brought him to the U.S. House of Representatives. Elected in 2002, Davis has built a reputation as an advocate for economic opportunities for low-income Americans and as a House Member who is attuned to the needs of his constituents.¹

Artur Davis was born on October 9, 1967, in Montgomery, Alabama. He was raised in the poor west end of Montgomery by his mother, a schoolteacher, and his grandmother after his parents divorced when he was young. He attended the city public schools, graduating from Jefferson Davis High School. In 1990, Davis earned a B.A. *magna cum laude* from Harvard University, and three years later he graduated with a J.D. from Harvard Law School. Davis immediately began positioning himself for a career in politics. He clerked for Judge Myron Thompson—one of the first African-American judges appointed in the Middle District of Alabama. Appointed an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the same district in 1994, Davis served in that capacity until 1998, when he left to make his first run for Congress. Davis is not married.

In the 2000 election campaign, Davis challenged five-term incumbent Earl F. Hilliard in the Democratic primary for a district that represented portions of Birmingham and Tuscaloosa as well as low-income agricultural counties in west-central Alabama that were part of the “Black Belt,” so called for its dark, productive soils. Hilliard prevailed with a 58 percent majority.² Two years later, however, Hilliard ran into political trouble over perceptions of his lack of influence in the House and criticisms by pro-Israel groups that he favored the Palestinian cause.³ Davis again challenged Hilliard in the Democratic primary, this time with support from the mayors of Birmingham and Selma. In a three-way contest, Hilliard failed to win an outright majority. In the runoff, Davis claimed 56 percent of the vote. In

the general election, running against a Libertarian candidate, Davis commanded a 92 percent majority. In his subsequent re-election campaigns, Davis won handily, garnering 75 percent in 2004 and facing no major party opposition in 2006.⁴

When Davis claimed his seat in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), he received assignments on the prestigious Budget and Financial Services committees. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Representative Davis was appointed a member of the Senior Whip Team for the Democratic Caucus. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Davis left the Budget and Financial Services committees to serve on two plum committees: Judiciary and Ways and Means. He also is a member of the Committee on House Administration and the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee.⁵

As a Representative-elect, Davis described his legislative agenda as focused on the “fundamentals”: schools, medical care, and transportation infrastructure.⁶ Like many freshman Members, Davis committed himself to constituent services, assembling a professional staff that ran five district offices and was eight times larger than the staff of his predecessor.⁷

As a House Member, Davis earned a reputation as being liberal on economic legislation and moderately conservative on controversial social issues.⁸ Davis has voted with a minority of Democrats to ban partial birth abortion and human cloning; he also supports a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. On issues of economic equality for Black Americans, Davis votes with his colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus. “I think I’ve always been able to overcome obstacles, overcome odds,” Davis said, shortly after winning his first election to the U.S. House. “That’s why I refuse to accept [that] the Black Belt has to lag behind the rest of our state.”⁹

The U.S. Census Bureau listed five of the 12 counties in Davis’s district as being among the 100 poorest in the country. Much of his agenda focuses on improving and expanding economic and educational opportunities for his constituents. During his freshman term, Davis successfully led an effort to restore funding for minority land grant colleges—including Tuskegee University—which had been cut in the annual budget. In the 109th Congress, he restored funding for HOPE VI, a program for renovating public housing, by convincing a large number of Republicans to cross the aisle and vote for his measure. Representative Davis worked with Representative Charles Rangel of New York to expand the child tax credit for poor families. Davis also was the lead Democratic sponsor of a bill to establish a national cord blood bank that will help provide blood transfusions to patients suffering from diseases such as sickle cell anemia and diabetes.¹⁰

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Danny K. Davis

1941–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

1997–

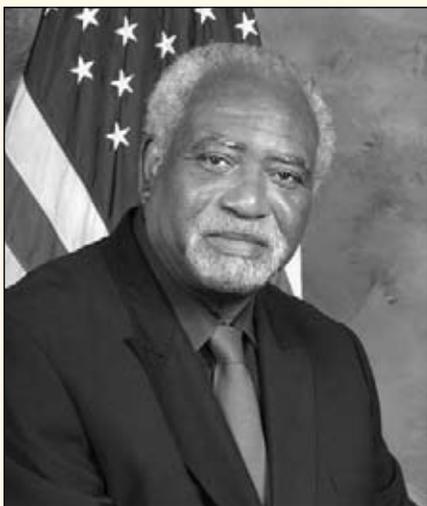


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Danny K. Davis was chosen by the people of the 7th Congressional District of Illinois as their Representative in Congress on November 5, 1996. He has been re-elected by large majorities to succeeding Congresses, most recently to the 110th Congress on November 7, 2006.

In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Davis serves on the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the Committee on Education and Labor. Representative Davis is also a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Progressive Caucus, the India Caucus, the Steel Caucus, the Arts Caucus, the Hellenic Caucus, and the Community Health Centers Caucus.

Representative Davis has distinguished himself as an articulate voice for his constituents and as an effective legislator able to move major bills to passage despite his relative lack of seniority. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Davis introduced the Second Chance Act, legislation to facilitate the return of ex-offenders to the community at large.

Davis has developed a unique and energetic style of communication and interaction with his constituents, setting up dozens of advisory task forces to consider significant questions of public policy. He hosts several weekly television and radio shows that feature audience call-in and distributes regular written reports to every household in his district. In addition, he maintains weekly office hours in the district, is widely sought after as a speaker at district events, and sponsors more than 40 town hall meetings each year.

Prior to his election to the Congress, he served on the Cook County board of commissioners, having been elected in November 1990 and re-elected in November 1994. Previously, he served for 11 years as a member of the Chicago city council as alderman of the 29th Ward.

Before seeking public office, Representative Davis had productive careers as an educator, a community organizer, a health planner/administrator and a civil rights advocate. He has received hundreds of awards and citations for outstanding work in the areas of health, education, human relations, politics, and advocacy. He has traveled extensively throughout the United States and has spent time in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and in South and Central America.

Representative Davis is noted for his volunteer and political work. He has served as founder/president of the Westside Association for Community Action, and president of the National Association of Community Health Centers, and was a member of the Harold Washington Campaign Committee and Transition Team in 1983, and a co-chair of the Clinton/Gore/Braun campaigns in 1992. He has also been an officer and a member of many other civic, professional, and social organizations.

Born in Parkdale, Arkansas, on September 6, 1941, Representative Davis moved to the west side of Chicago in 1961, after having earned a bachelor of arts degree from Arkansas A.M. & N. College. He subsequently earned master's and doctoral degrees, respectively, from Chicago State University and the Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio.

He is married to Vera G. Davis and has two sons, Jonathan and Stacey. He is a member and deacon of the New Galilee M.B. Church. Davis is a public servant, an elected official and politician whose primary concern is truly the public interest.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Chaka Fattah
1956–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM PENNSYLVANIA

1995–

A Philadelphia native, Chaka Fattah has represented a U.S. House district covering large sections of the northern and western parts of the city for seven terms. Fattah served 12 years in the Pennsylvania state legislature before winning his first House election in 1994. “I hope my accomplishment, my achievement, will be in legislation, not in how high a position I reached,” Fattah, a member of the influential Appropriations Committee, once explained. “It wouldn’t matter to me what position I had if I got two or three bills passed. Very few people actually drive the policy machine. I want to be one of those people.”¹

Chaka Fattah was born Arthur Davenport on November 21, 1956, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the fourth of six sons of Russell and Frances Davenport. His father was a U.S. Army sergeant, and his mother was an editor at the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest black newspaper in America, and served as vice president of the Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations. His parents divorced when he was young, and Fattah’s mother remarried. She renamed her son Chaka, after an African Zulu warrior. Her social activism shaped Fattah’s political development. “I grew up in a home where being involved in community life was a norm,” Fattah recalled.² Fattah attended the Community College of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. In 1986, he graduated with an M.A. in government administration from the University of Pennsylvania’s Fels School of State and Local Government. Fattah held several community development positions before making his first bid for elective office in 1982. He unseated a Democratic incumbent by 58 votes to win a seat in the Pennsylvania house of representatives. At age 25, he was one of the youngest people ever to serve in the state legislature. In 1988, Fattah won a seat in the Pennsylvania senate.³ As a freshman senator, Fattah chaired the education committee. Fattah is married to Renee Chenault-Fattah, and they have four children.

Fattah made his first bid for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1991, when Representative William H. Gray III retired from a seat that covered large areas of Center City Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill, and the University of Pennsylvania. In the special election to succeed Gray, City Councilman Lucien Blackwell received the Democratic nomination, and Fattah ran under the Consumer Party banner. Blackwell won with 39 percent of the vote to Fattah's 28 percent. In 1994, Fattah again challenged Blackwell in the Democratic primary and prevailed with 58 percent of the vote. In the heavily Democratic and majority-black district, he won the general election with 86 percent of the vote. In his subsequent six re-election campaigns, Fattah has won easily—most recently with 89 percent of the vote in the 2006 election.⁴

Since entering Congress in 1995, Fattah has held seats on several committees, including Economic and Educational Opportunities (later renamed Government Reform), Government Reform and Oversight (later renamed Education and Labor), Small Business, the Standards of Official Conduct, House Administration, the Joint Committee on Printing, and Appropriations. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has appointed Representative Chaka Fattah Chairman of the Urban Caucus. The caucus brings together House Members who represent the nation's largest metropolitan areas to formulate ideas on how to best address the challenges faced in America's urban communities.

In Congress, Representative Fattah has focused on issues of access to a quality education. His biggest legislative success came in 1998 when he won congressional backing for GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a federally funded measure to prepare low-income students to enter college and excel. To date, more than \$2 billion has been appropriated for the program, which is available to millions of students.⁵ Representative Fattah developed the College Retention Program, which gives low-income students access to low-interest loans and work study programs. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Fattah introduced his Student Bill of Rights Act, requiring each state to certify with the U.S. Secretary of Education that its public school system provides students with equal access to resources and qualified teachers.⁶

Fattah also has proposed legislation drawing from his background in housing reform and urban renewal projects. He has championed a plan to allow homeowners a two-year grace period from defaulting on mortgages because of unforeseen circumstances. His Transform America Transaction Fee proposal calls for the elimination of all federal taxes on individuals and businesses—and their replacement with a revenue system based on transaction fees.⁷

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Al Green
1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM TEXAS

2005–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

In 2005, Judge Al Green took the congressional oath of office to serve the people of Texas's new 9th Congressional District and began his first term in the United States House of Representatives. As a Houston judge and lawyer, and the Houston National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch president, he has dedicated most of his life to fighting for those in society whose voices are too often unheard, taken for granted, or simply ignored.

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Representative Green learned the importance of education from his parents and extended family, who instilled within him the drive and determination to succeed in spite of obstacles. After graduating from Chactawhatchee High School, he attended Florida A&M University and Tuskegee Institute of Technology. Although he did not acquire an undergraduate degree, he entered law school. In 1974, Representative Green earned his law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University, where he later served as an instructor.

Upon graduating from law school, Green cofounded and co-managed the law firm of Green, Wilson, Dewberry and Fitch. In 1977, he was appointed judge of a Harris County justice court, where he served for 26 years before retiring in 2004.

Throughout his career, Green has earned the respect of his colleagues and a wide cross section of community leaders. He has been recognized for his superior legal skills, impeccable character, and innate ability to communicate skillfully with people from diverse backgrounds.

For nearly 10 years, Green served as president of the Houston branch of the NAACP. Under his leadership, the organization grew to unprecedented heights, acquiring property and increasing its membership from a few hundred to thousands.

Representative Green would become known as an unwavering defender of equality and a champion of justice for all. During his tenure, he oversaw the purchase and renovation of two buildings that would serve as the Houston NAACP's headquarters. In an effort to ensure that all Houstonians could participate in their economy, Green created the Houston Fair Share Program, which encourages corporations to join with minority firms in joint ventures and to hire minority vendors. He also cofounded the Black and Brown Coalition with Judge Armando Rodriguez to bring together Houston's African-American and Latino communities to work on issues of common interest.

During his first term as a Member of the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Representative Green acquired a seat on the Financial Services Committee. He has remained an active member of that committee in the 110th Congress (2007–2009), serving on the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit as well as the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity. In the 109th Congress, he also acquired a seat on the Science Committee (later renamed Science and Technology), serving on the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee—a key appointment considering the proximity of the 9th District to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Johnson Space Flight Center. In the 110th Congress, Representative Green left the Science and Technology Committee to take a spot on the Homeland Security Committee. He sits on the Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism and the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology.

Green's chief legislative priorities for his second term in office are creating a federal living wage; reducing chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats; eliminating policies and practices that have historically victimized low- and moderate-income communities; and increasing the availability of affordable housing to ensure that every American can realize the dream of having a place to call home.

While working on current priorities, Representative Green maintains his focus on his compelling goals of eliminating poverty, expanding economic opportunities, protecting Social Security, providing affordable health care, perfecting national security, improving education, and promoting world peace.

Representative Green was elected Whip of Region VI and serves as the Housing Task Force Chair for CAPAC, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

FOR FURTHER READING

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Alcee Hastings
1936–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM FLORIDA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

The son of domestic workers, Alcee L. Hastings became Florida's first African-American federal judge and, in 1992, one of the first handful of blacks to represent the state in the U.S. Congress in the 20th century. An eight-term veteran of the House, Representative Hastings holds high-ranking positions on both the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Rules Committee.

Alcee Lamar Hastings, son of Julius C. and Mildred L. Hastings, was born in Altamonte Springs, Florida, on September 5, 1936. His parents were domestic servants who eventually left the state to take jobs to pay for his education. Hastings, who lived with his maternal grandmother, graduated from Crooms Academy in Sanford, Florida, in 1953. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in zoology and botany from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1958 and later attended Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. In 1963, Hastings graduated with a J.D. from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University in Tallahassee. In 1964, he was admitted to the Florida bar, and he practiced as a civil rights attorney for the next 13 years. Hastings is twice-divorced, with three children: Alcee Lamar III, Chelsea, and Leigh. From 1977 to 1979, Hastings served as a circuit court judge in Broward County, Florida. In 1979, President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter appointed Hastings to a U.S. District Court seat in Miami, making him the first black federal judge in Florida history.¹

In 1992, when court-ordered reapportionment created a U.S. congressional district that was 44-percent black, covering large portions of Broward County, including West Palm Beach and western Fort Lauderdale, Hastings entered the Democratic primary for the seat. In a close race in September 1992, Hastings placed second in a five-candidate primary behind Florida State Representative Lois Frankel, although he managed to force a runoff.² Hastings defeated Frankel with 58 percent

of the vote in the October 1 runoff.³ The primary victory in the heavily Democratic district virtually assured Hastings a seat in the U.S. House. In the November general election, he defeated Republican candidate Ed Fielding, a real estate salesman, with 58 percent of the vote.⁴ Along with newly elected Representatives Carrie Meek and Corrine Brown, Hastings became one of the first African Americans elected to the U.S. Congress from Florida since the Reconstruction Era. In his subsequent seven re-election campaigns, Hastings has won with majorities of 73 percent or more. On four occasions—1994, 1998, 2004, and 2006—he was unopposed in the general election.⁵

When Hastings entered the House in January 1993, he received assignments on three committees: Foreign Affairs, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, and Post Office and Civil Service. He served on Foreign Affairs (later renamed International Relations) through the 107th Congress (2001–2003). When Merchant Marine and Fisheries and Post Office and Civil Service were disbanded in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), he was reassigned to the Science Committee, where he served through the 105th Congress (1997–1999). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Hastings earned a seat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, where he eventually served as vice chairman of the full committee and two of its subcommittees before leaving the panel at the end of 2007. During the 107th Congress, Hastings served as vice chairman of the Democratic Caucus's Special Committee on Election Reform, a panel assigned to investigate voting discrepancies in the 2000 election. In the following Congress, he won a seat on the powerful Rules Committee, which directs legislation onto the House Floor. He currently serves as chairman of the Rules Committee's Subcommittee on Legislative and Budget Process. Hastings also serves as a Senior Democratic Whip.⁶

Widely regarded as a charismatic orator, Representative Hastings is a leading voice for liberal causes in the House. But his seats on the Rules and Permanent Select Intelligence committees also provide him a platform from which he can cultivate legislation important to his district and to minorities nationally. Hastings's legislative interests center on fostering educational and economic opportunities for his constituency, including federal funding for Head Start programs, Medicare, and job training and re-education for displaced workers. He has advocated tax incentives to spur small business development. On the Intelligence Committee, Representative Hastings has prodded U.S. intelligence agencies to recruit more minorities and women, and he successfully included a provision in the 2004 intelligence authorization bill to create a pilot program to achieve that end. Hastings also is one of the institution's experts on overseas elections and serves as chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and is a member of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.⁷

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★ 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.¹

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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ In his six re-election bids, Jackson has never been seriously challenged, winning majorities of between 89 and 94 percent of the vote.⁵

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.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Sheila Jackson Lee

1950–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM TEXAS

1995–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Sheila Jackson Lee won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994 in a Houston district once served by Barbara Jordan. From her seats on the Judiciary, Homeland Security, and Foreign Affairs committees, Representative Jackson Lee has focused on the needs of her district. She also has called attention to such national issues as bolstering the protection of our homeland while preserving civil liberties, health care, and job training for working-class Americans.

Sheila Jackson was born in Queens, New York, on January 12, 1950. Her mother was a nurse, and her father was a comic book illustrator. Jackson graduated from Jamaica High School and attended New York University. In 1969, she transferred with the first group of female undergraduates admitted to Yale College and graduated in 1972 with a B.A. in political science. Before receiving her J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1975, Sheila Jackson married fellow Yale graduate Elwyn Cornelius Lee in 1973; they raised two children, Erica and Jason. In 1977 and 1978, she worked as a staff counsel for the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the murders of Martin Luther King, Jr., and President John F. Kennedy. She left private law practice in 1987 to serve as an associate judge in the Houston municipal courts. Three years later, she won election to the first of two terms as an at-large member of the Houston city council.

In 1994, Jackson Lee challenged incumbent Craig Washington for the Democratic nomination to the Houston-area U.S. House seat. Her platform reflected broad agreement with the William J. (Bill) Clinton administration agenda. Promoting measures that would benefit the Houston economy, Jackson Lee defeated her opponent, with 63 percent of the vote, in the primary. She won handily with a 73 percent majority in the general election. In her subsequent six re-elections, Jackson Lee won easily, capturing a high of 90 percent in 1998. Jackson Lee followed a succession of prestigious Representatives from her district, including Jordan and noted humanitarian George (Mickey) Leland. Created after the 1970 Census, Jackson Lee's district was the first in Texas in which African Americans and Hispanics constituted the majority of voters.

When Jackson Lee took her seat in the 104th Congress (1995–1997), she received assignments on the Judiciary and Science (later renamed Science and Technology) committees. Her colleagues elected her Democratic freshman class president. Jackson Lee was also appointed to the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee. In 1997, she was selected as a Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) whip and thereafter as first vice chair of the CBC. By the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Jackson Lee was the top-ranking Democrat on the Immigration and Claims Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Jackson Lee was assigned to the Homeland Security Committee, where in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) she chairs the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection. In 2007, Jackson Lee coauthored and ensured the passage of the Rail and Public Transportation Security Act, which authorized more than \$5 billion to overhaul security for U.S. railroads, mass transit, and buses. In the 110th Congress, she also left the Science and Technology Committee for a seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

In Congress, Jackson Lee battled GOP initiatives to reduce welfare. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she pushed for legislation to protect child support and alimony payments from creditors. As a cofounder of the Congressional Children’s Caucus, she also sponsored bills to create affordable childcare for working parents and to strengthen adoption laws. Jackson Lee spearheaded efforts to reduce teenage smoking addiction and authored the “Date Rape Drug Prevention Act” to curb the availability of substances used by rapists. She also strongly defended affirmative action programs. From her seat on the Science Committee, Jackson Lee sought to restore appropriations for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 1999, and also supported extending provisions in a 1998 bill to grow the commercial space launch industry. She persuaded the Clinton administration to make low-income Houston neighborhoods eligible for federal grants for economic development, job training, childcare facilities, and improved transportation. Jackson Lee also coauthored and helped pass the historic Notification of Federal Employees Anti-Discrimination and Retaliation (“No Fear”) Act. Described as the first civil rights act of the 21st century, the measure protects federal workers, and especially whistleblowers, from acts of discrimination and retaliation.

Jackson Lee maintained that such advocacy was part of her job representing constituents. “You have an obligation to make sure that their concerns are heard, are answered,” she explained. “I need to make a difference. I don’t have wealth to write a check. But maybe I can be a voice arguing consistently for change.”

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

William J. Jefferson

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM LOUISIANA

1991–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

When William Jefferson won election to the U.S. House in 1990 from a New Orleans-centered district, he became the first African American to represent the state of Louisiana since Reconstruction. Jefferson, who had more than a decade of experience in the Louisiana state senate, specialized in economic matters and eventually earned a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee.

William Jennings Jefferson was born on March 14, 1947, in Lake Providence, Louisiana. Jefferson grew up in poverty in a family of 10 children in the far northeastern part of the state. In 1969, he graduated from Southern University Agricultural and Mechanical College with a B.A. degree. Three years later, on scholarship, he earned a J.D. from Harvard Law School. In 1996, Jefferson earned a Master of Laws in taxation from Georgetown University. After law school, he served for a year as a law clerk for veteran U.S. District Court Judge Alvin B. Rubin in New Orleans. From 1973 to 1975, Jefferson then served as a legislative assistant to Senator J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana. Jefferson is married to Dr. Andrea Green-Jefferson, and they have raised five daughters: Jamila, Jalila, Jelani, Nailah, and Akilah.¹

Jefferson entered elective politics in the late 1970s, when he defeated a white incumbent for a Louisiana senate seat that covered the affluent Uptown section of New Orleans. He served in Baton Rouge for 12 years, working on the finance committee and chairing the special budget stabilization committee, which was created to rein in state spending and develop more accurate revenue projections. He also chaired the influential governmental affairs committee, which had oversight of reapportionment.² In 1982 and 1986, Jefferson was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of New Orleans.

In 1990, when 17-year House veteran Corinne C. (Lindy) Boggs announced her retirement, Jefferson entered a crowded field to succeed her. The district covered much of New Orleans proper, the wealthy Uptown section, Algiers on the west bank

of the Mississippi River, and the sprawling Kenner suburbs on the city's west side. In 1983, court-ordered redistricting made it the state's first majority-black district and, by 1990, Representative Boggs was the last white Representative in the country to represent a majority black-district. Jefferson was one of four principal contenders in the October open primary, which included Marc H. Morial, son of former mayor Dutch Morial (who served from 1978 to 1986 and the city's first African-American mayor), a state senator who had been endorsed by the governor, and a prominent city school board member. Jefferson finished first with 25 percent of the vote, with Morial trailing at 22 percent.³ In the spirited two-man November runoff, Jefferson prevailed with 53 percent of the vote. In his subsequent seven re-election campaigns, Jefferson won handily with 73 percent of the vote or more.⁴

When Jefferson took his seat in the House in the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), he earned seats on the Education and Labor and the Merchant Marine and Fisheries committees. In the following Congress, he relinquished those assignments for a coveted spot on the Ways and Means Committee. When the Republicans took control of the chamber for the 104th Congress (1995–1997) Jefferson lost his Ways and Means post and was transferred to the National Security Committee (later renamed Armed Services), the House Oversight Committee (later renamed House Administration), and the Joint Committee on Printing. In the next Congress, Jefferson again won an assignment to the exclusive Ways and Means Committee, relinquishing his prior assignments. He remained on Ways and Means until June 2006, adding an assignment to the Budget Committee in the 109th Congress. In the 110th Congress, Jefferson was assigned to the Small Business Committee.

In Congress, Jefferson specializes in trade and tax issues. New Orleans is a major U.S. port, and trade is a primary economic engine. Jefferson has advocated trade opportunities in neglected markets such as Brazil and Africa. He served as co-chair of the Africa Trade and Investment Caucus and also chaired the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation board of directors. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which flooded much of New Orleans and its surrounding environs in August 2005, Jefferson pushed for reforms to the Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster loan program, which was criticized in the aftermath of the storm. The House also passed Jefferson's amendment to extend the deadline for minority-owned businesses in his district to rebuild under the SBA's redevelopment program.⁵

In 2006, Jefferson was re-elected to a ninth term against Democratic challenger Karen Carter, with 57 percent of the vote.⁶

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★ 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

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Stephanie Tubbs Jones

1949–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM OHIO

1999–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Stephanie Tubbs Jones won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1998, becoming the first African-American woman to represent Ohio in the U.S. Congress. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Jones became the first African-American woman to chair a standing House committee.¹ Representative Jones, who chairs the Standards of Official Conduct Committee and holds a seat on the influential Ways and Means Committee, has focused on the economic issues affecting her Cleveland-centered district: financial literacy, access to health care, retirement security, and education.

Stephanie Tubbs was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 10, 1949, the youngest of three daughters raised by Mary Tubbs, a factory worker, and Andrew Tubbs, an airline skycap. Raised in Cleveland's Glenville neighborhood, Stephanie Tubbs graduated from Collinwood High School, earning 10 academic and athletic awards. At Case Western Reserve University, Tubbs founded the African-American Students Association and, in 1971, earned a B.A. in sociology with a minor in psychology. "All my life I had wanted to help others, and I had been active in helping others," she recalled. "I was always interested in service. In my day, the college watchword was relevant. . . . With a law degree, I thought I could bring about relevant change in the world."² She enrolled in the Case Western University Law School and graduated in 1974 with a J.D. Tubbs then served as the assistant general counsel for the equal opportunity administrator of the northeast Ohio regional sewer district. In 1976, Tubbs married Mervyn Jones. They raised a son, Mervyn. Stephanie Tubbs Jones later worked as an assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor and trial attorney for the Cleveland district equal employment opportunity commission. When Jones and several friends worked on a successful political campaign in 1979, the group pledged to select one among them to promote for public office. Noting a lack of minority members on the bench, they chose Jones, who eventually won election as a judge on the Cleveland municipal court. Ohio Governor Richard Celeste appointed Jones to the Cuyahoga County court of common pleas, where she served from 1983 to 1991. In 1992, she was appointed the Cuyahoga County prosecutor, making her the state's first African-American prosecutor and the only black woman prosecutor in a major U.S. city. Jones was re-elected twice.³

In 1998, when 30-year veteran U.S. Representative Louis Stokes retired from his Ohio district seat, Jones entered the Democratic primary to succeed him. She ran on the basis of her 17-year career in public office in the district and on her well-established political connection to constituents.⁴ Capturing 51 percent of the vote among five primary candidates, she later won 80 percent in the general election. Jones faced no serious challenges in her four re-election bids, winning by 75 percent or more of the vote.⁵ In 2006, Jones won with 83 percent.⁶

When she took her seat in the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Jones received assignments on the Banking and Financial Services (later renamed Financial Services) and Small Business committees. In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), in addition to serving on those two panels, she served on the Standards of Official Conduct Committee, which oversees House ethics guidelines for Members and staff. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Jones won a seat on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over tax law.⁷

Representative Jones's district encompasses some of Cleveland's most affluent suburbs and parts of poor, inner-city neighborhoods. Her seat on Financial Services helped her secure funding for business and housing development. In the 108th Congress, Jones chaired the Congressional Black Caucus Housing Task Force, investigating allegations against subprime lenders and introducing legislation against predatory lenders.⁸ Her seat on Ways and Means has enabled her to focus legislative efforts on shoring up Social Security and Medicare, pension law, and long-term care.

Jones also has taken a legislative interest in children's issues, health, and education. She authored and passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement Act of 1999 to increase training funds for child-protection workers through money generated from bail bonds, fines, and forfeited assets. In the 107th through the 109th Congresses (2001–2007), Representative Jones introduced the Uterine Fibroids Research and Education Act and also authored the Campus Fire Prevention Act to provide federal funds to equip college housing with fire suppression equipment. In 2005, Jones introduced the Count Every Vote Act to improve electronic voting systems. Additionally, she authored legislation to clarify the legal status of cash balance pension plans. In the 109th Congress, she chaired the Congressional Black Caucus Retirement Security Task Force.

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- 2 Richard Fenno, *Going Home: Black Representatives and Their Constituents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 193.
- 3 "Stephanie Tubbs Jones," *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 24 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc., 2000).
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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick
1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MICHIGAN

1997–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

A 30-year veteran of Michigan politics, Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996. Kilpatrick was the first African-American woman to serve on the Michigan legislature's appropriations committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Kilpatrick was unanimously elected chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

Carolyn Jean Cheeks was born on June 25, 1945, in Detroit, Michigan, to Marvell Cheeks, Jr., and Willa Mae (Henry) Cheeks. Raised in the AME Church, she later joined the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, a politically active and powerful congregation in Detroit. She served as coordinator of political action.¹ She graduated from the High School of Commerce in Detroit as president of her class and attended Ferris State University. She earned a bachelor of science degree in education from Western Michigan University in 1972 and a master of science degree in education from the University of Michigan. In 1968, the Representative married Bernard Kilpatrick. They raised two children, Ayanna and Kwame. Early in her career, Kilpatrick worked as a Detroit public school teacher. A protégé of longtime Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, she left teaching in 1978 to pursue a political career and won election to nine consecutive terms in the Michigan house of representatives. Serving 18 years in the state house, Kilpatrick became the first African-American woman member of the house appropriations committee. She chaired the corrections budget and the transportation budget during 14 years on the appropriations committee. She also was a house Democratic whip—earning a reputation as a consensus-builder.²

Kilpatrick sought election in 1996 to represent Michigan in the U.S. House of Representatives. Among a large field of competitors in the Democratic primary, including three-term incumbent Barbara-Rose Collins, Kilpatrick prevailed with a 19 percent margin. In the general election, Kilpatrick captured an 88 percent majority. In her subsequent five re-election bids, she has won by similarly large margins, despite reapportionment in 2001.³

When Representative Kilpatrick took her seat in the 105th Congress (1997–1999), she received assignments on three committees: Banking and Financial Services, House Oversight (later renamed House Administration), and the Joint Committee on the Library of Congress. In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Kilpatrick won a seat on the prestigious House Appropriations Committee, which required her to leave her other committee assignments. She is the sole Michigan Democrat to serve on the committee. She is the fifth woman to head the full CBC. Kilpatrick also is the first African-American Member of Congress to serve on the Air Force Academy Board, which oversees programs of the U.S. Air Force Academy.⁴

Much of Kilpatrick's legislative work has centered on bringing federally funded projects into the State of Michigan. She has helped garner funding for pre-college engineering, children's television programming, and enhanced rehabilitation services at the Detroit Medical Center.⁵ She also initiated a transportation bill that included \$24 million for an intermodal freight terminal that links rail, marine, and road delivery lines.⁶ She has initiated \$100 million in the current five-year U.S. transportation bill for a commuter rail system that covers more than 50 miles in southeastern Michigan. Kilpatrick's efforts brought the National Aeronautics and Space Administration engineering and aeronautics program to Michigan for students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade. The program is housed at Wayne State University.

Representative Kilpatrick has been an outspoken advocate for affordable health care for low- and middle-income families and for raising the minimum wage. Kilpatrick also proposed legislation to provide a \$1,000 per month tax credit for medical doctors who practice in underserved areas. Representative Kilpatrick has sought to encourage corporate America and the federal government to invest more money in minority- and women-owned media outlets and advertising agencies. From her seat on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, Kilpatrick brought attention to health and economic woes in sub-Saharan Africa, securing more than \$25 million for flood relief in Mozambique, Madagascar, Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Representative Kilpatrick has initiated funding for HIV/AIDS programs, education, and military assistance in America and in several African countries.

The Honorable Kwame Kilpatrick succeeded Representative Kilpatrick in the Michigan house of representatives. Kwame Kilpatrick went on to become the Democratic leader of the state house of representatives. In 2001, at 30 years of age, Kwame Kilpatrick was elected mayor of the city of Detroit.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Barbara Lee
1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

1998–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Representative Barbara Lee was first elected to represent California's 9th Congressional District in 1998, in a special election to fill the seat of retiring Representative Ronald Dellums. After serving on the International Relations and Financial Services committees, in 2007 she joined the House Appropriations Committee, which controls the federal purse strings and is widely viewed as one of the most powerful committees in Congress. On that committee, she serves on the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee and the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee, and is Vice Chair of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee.

She also serves as the Co-Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and is a cofounder of the Out of Iraq and Out of Poverty caucuses, a Senior Democratic Whip, and First Vice Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), where she serves as Co-Chair of the CBC Outreach Task Force and Chair of the CBC Task Force on HIV/AIDS.

Among her many legislative victories, Representative Lee's Darfur divestment bill passed Congress in late 2007 and was subsequently signed into law. She has been a leader in the bipartisan effort in Congress to end the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan. She was arrested for protesting the genocide in front of the Sudanese Embassy in Washington in June 2006 and has traveled to the Darfur region several times.

Representative Lee's accomplishments in promoting effective bipartisan legislation to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and make treatment available for those who are infected have earned her international recognition as a leader in the global

fight against HIV/AIDS. Her bills to create the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, to protect AIDS orphans, and to create a \$15 billion fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria were all signed into law. She has also been a leader in the fight to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in the United States, particularly in the African-American community. In 1998, she helped declare a state of emergency in Alameda County in order to secure more funds to fight the disease, and the House has passed her resolution recognizing the goals of National Black AIDS Awareness Day every year since 2005.

Representative Lee's willingness to stand on principle earned her international acclaim when she was the only Member of Congress to vote against giving President George W. Bush a blank check to wage war after the horrific September 11 attacks. In addition to being one of Congress's most vocal opponents of the war in Iraq, Representative Lee has been a leader in promoting policies that foster international peace, security, and human rights. She successfully blocked funds from being used to establish permanent military bases in Iraq during the 109th Congress (2005–2007). She sponsored legislation disavowing the doctrine of preemptive war.

Representative Lee is committed to eradicating poverty, fostering opportunity, and protecting the most vulnerable in our society. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, she authored the poverty section of the CBC's Gulf Coast reconstruction legislation and introduced a package of bills designed to make the eradication of poverty a priority for Congress.

California's 9th Congressional District encompasses most of Alameda County, including the cities of Albany, Ashland, Berkeley, Castro Valley, Cherryville, Emeryville, Fairview, Oakland, and Piedmont.

Born in El Paso, Texas, Representative Lee graduated from Mills College in Oakland and received her M.S.W. from the University of California in Berkeley. She began her political career as an intern in the office of her predecessor, then-Representative Ronald Dellums, currently the mayor of Oakland, where she eventually became his chief of staff. Before being elected to Congress, she served in the California state assembly from 1990 to 1996 and in the California state senate from 1996 to 1998.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

John Lewis

1940–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM GEORGIA

1987–

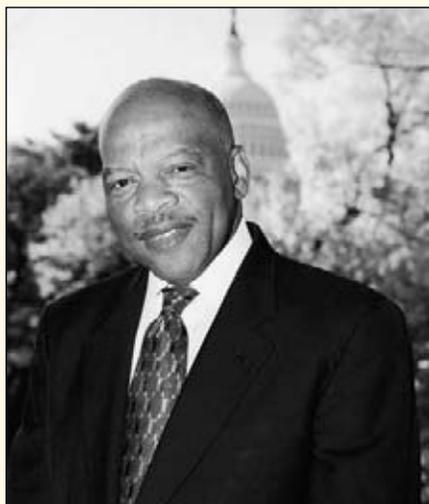


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Dubbed “the Conscience of the U.S. Congress,” John Lewis spent his early life as one of the principal leaders of the nonviolent civil rights movement initiated by Martin Luther King, Jr.¹ Now in his 11th term in the U.S. House, Representative Lewis holds a seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee, from which he speaks with passion and authority about issues related to the legacy of that movement.

John Robert Lewis was born on February 21, 1940, in Troy, Alabama, to Eddie and Willie Mae Lewis. His parents originally were sharecroppers before they bought a 110-acre farm, where they raised cotton and peanuts. To help support the family of 10 children, Eddie Lewis drove a school bus and Willie Mae worked as a laundress.² John Lewis grew up attending segregated public schools. Shy and soft-spoken, Lewis was drawn to preaching. He eventually earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1961 from the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. Lewis then enrolled at Fisk University, also in Nashville, graduating with a B.A. degree in religion and philosophy in 1967.

Lewis played a central role in the American civil rights movement. He was a founder and chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), eventually becoming one of the “Big Six” civil rights leaders—the others being King, Whitney Young, A. Phillip Randolph, James Farmer, and Roy Wilkins. He participated in the Freedom Rides to desegregate commercial busing in the South. He helped to organize the March on Washington, delivering a keynote address at the August 1963 gathering.³ Lewis also led the Bloody Sunday protest in Selma, Alabama, when baton-wielding state troopers beat and tear-gassed peaceful marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965. That event provided the catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Lewis later served as associate director of the Field Foundation and directed the Voter Education Project of the South Regional Council. In 1968, Lewis married Lillian Miles; the couple has one son, John.

Lewis first ran for congressional office when Atlanta Representative Andrew Young resigned his U.S. House seat in 1977 to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. In a crowded special primary on March 15, 1977, Lewis won 29 percent of the vote—second in a field of 12, behind Atlanta City Council Chairman Wyche Fowler. In a run-off several weeks later, Fowler prevailed with 62 percent of the vote.⁴ In 1977, President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter appointed Lewis to head the federal volunteer agency ACTION. He remained there four years before winning election to the Atlanta city council.

In 1986, when Fowler retired to run for the U.S. Senate, Lewis entered the Democratic primary for the seat that covered most of Atlanta and rural areas in southwest Fulton County. Reapportionment in 1982 had turned a district that formerly was half-white into one that was nearly two-thirds black. In a runoff primary against his former SNCC colleague and then-Georgia State Senator Julian Bond, Lewis went door to door in the district in a relentless grass-roots effort that won over a coalition of poor inner-city blacks and voters in majority-white precincts. He prevailed with a 52 percent majority.⁵ In the general election, Lewis defeated Republican candidate Portia A. Scott with 75 percent of the vote. In his subsequent 10 re-election campaigns, Lewis has won by similar margins, running unopposed since 2002.⁶

When Lewis entered the House in January 1987, he was assigned to two committees: Public Works and Transportation and Interior and Insular Affairs. In the 101st Congress (1989–1991), he received an additional post on the House Select Committee on Aging. He relinquished all three assignments in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995) after winning a coveted seat on the powerful Ways and Means Committee, which sets tax policy. He has remained on that panel since and currently serves as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight. Lewis also served in the 108th Congress (2003–2005) on the Budget Committee. In addition, Representative Lewis has served as a Chief Deputy Whip for the Democratic Caucus since 1989. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Lewis serves as Senior Chief Deputy Whip.

Representative Lewis's legislative interests draw chiefly from his background as a civil rights activist; he supports legislation to protect and expand voting rights measures and to provide better access to health care for minorities. Lewis's legislation creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, a unit of the Smithsonian Institution, was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2003.

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NOTES

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★ 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

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- 6 “U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek Takes Office in Historic Capitol Ceremony,” *Broward Times*, 10 January 2003.
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- 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.
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- 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*.

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Gregory W. Meeks

1953–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW YORK

1998–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Gregory W. Meeks, a former Queens prosecutor and New York state legislator, has represented his Queens-centered House district for six terms. An advocate for business development in the African-American community, Meeks once noted that his role “as part of a new generation of African American leadership, is to take us to the new phase of the civil rights movement, that is, the economic development of our community.”¹

Gregory Weldon Meeks was born on September 25, 1953, in East Harlem, New York. His father, James, was a taxi driver and handyman, while his mother, Mary, raised Gregory and his three younger siblings. He recalled growing up in a household that was active in community affairs. His political role model was Thurgood Marshall, a civil rights advocate and the first black U.S. Supreme Court Justice. “He was someone I really admired because he was trying to make conditions better for people like me,” Meeks recalled.² In 1975, he earned a bachelor of arts degree from Adelphi University on Long Island. In 1978, Meeks graduated with a J.D. from Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. Meeks settled in Far Rockaway in Queens, where he was active in community organizations that aimed to improve city services and repair streets. He served two-year stints as an assistant district attorney in Queens, an assistant special narcotics prosecutor in New York, and a member of the New York State Investigation Commission. He later went into private law practice and, from 1985 to 1992, served as a judge on the New York state workers compensation board. His career in elective politics began in 1991 when he made an unsuccessful bid for the New York city council. Subsequently, Meeks was appointed supervising judge of the New York state workers compensation system. The following year Meeks won election to the New York state assembly, representing a Queens district from 1992 to 1997. Meeks and his wife, Simone-Marie, whom he married in 1997, have three daughters: Ebony, Aja, and Nia-Aiyana.

In 1997, when Representative Floyd Flake announced his retirement from a U.S. House seat representing Queens, Meeks emerged as a leading candidate to succeed the six-term veteran. Meeks received endorsements from Flake, the *New York Times*, and other figures in the Democratic establishment.³ As the Democratic nominee, Meeks portrayed himself as “a bridge-builder” between the party’s liberal and

moderate wings.⁴ In the five-way February 3 special election that included a New York state senator and an assemblywoman, Meeks prevailed with 57 percent of the vote. He told the *New York Times*: “I’m one who understands that, particularly in the African-American community, the key is now economic. We have to move toward the economic redistribution of our community more than we have in the past.”⁵ In his subsequent five re-elections, Meeks has prevailed by comfortable majorities of 97 percent or more.⁶

When Meeks was sworn in to the 105th Congress (1997–1999) on February 5, 1998, he received a seat on the Banking and Financial Services Committee (later renamed Financial Services). In the 106th Congress (1999–2001), Meeks also was appointed to the International Relations Committee (later renamed Foreign Affairs). Representative Meeks continues to serve on both panels. He is a member of the New Democratic Coalition and the Democratic Leadership Council.

In the House, Representative Meeks’s legislative priorities encompass improving educational opportunities, ensuring minority business participation, expanding trade, and defending civil rights. Meeks has promoted economic redevelopment in Queens, including acquiring federal money for commercial areas and office buildings, health clinics, libraries, and infrastructure improvements. He also has been attentive to economic policies affecting JFK International Airport, which is located in his district.⁷ On major trade issues, Meeks has been a “swing” vote—approving the normalization of trade relations with China in 2000 (citing the potential for new business in his district) while opposing a 2002 law that expanded the George W. Bush administration’s trade authority on the grounds that Congress should not yield power to a President who did not have its strongest confidence. As a member of the Financial Services Subcommittee on Capital Markets, Insurance, and Government Sponsored Enterprises, Meeks has sought to promote home ownership and curb predatory lending practices.

From his seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Meeks has called for a greater role for U.S. trade and development policies in the formulation of foreign policy. He has been a leading advocate for the advancement of Afro-Latinos, increased U.S. attention to Western Hemisphere priorities, humanitarian aid to Africa, and trade adjustment assistance to spread the benefits of trade to marginalized communities. Meeks serves on three subcommittees: Western Hemisphere, Oversight and Investigations, and Asia and the Pacific, where he is vice chairman.

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★ 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.”¹

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.² Moore is the mother of three children: Jessalynne, Sowande, and Ade.³

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.⁴ 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."⁵ In her 2006 re-election bid, Representative Moore defeated Republican Perfecto Rivera with 71 percent of the vote.⁶

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.⁷

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."⁸ 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.⁹ Her interest in the effects of economic globalization led to her being asked to serve on the worldwide Parliamentary Network of the World Bank.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Eleanor Holmes Norton

1937–

DELEGATE

DEMOCRAT FROM THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

1991–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

A civil rights and constitutional lawyer, a former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and a tenured professor of law, Eleanor Holmes Norton has carried her lifelong commitments to Congress as the Delegate for the District of Columbia. Since 1991, Norton has tirelessly advocated DC congressional voting rights and DC statehood while using innovative approaches to obtain federal funds and legislation to improve the city's economy and tax base. "I have been elected to Congress not to further my own interests, but to bring resources and respect to the District of Columbia," she said. "The ethics of the bar require zealous representation. That's how I understand my relationship to my folks."¹

Eleanor Holmes was born in Washington, DC, on June 13, 1937, the oldest of three daughters of Coleman Holmes, a civil servant, and Vela Lynch Holmes, a teacher. She attended Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, and earned a B.A. at Antioch College in Ohio in 1960. Norton earned an M.A. in American studies in 1963 and a law degree in 1964, both from Yale University. While a student, she worked in the civil rights movement with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. After graduating, she clerked for federal Judge A. Leon Higginbotham in Philadelphia. She then became assistant legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 1965, Eleanor Holmes married Edward Norton. The couple raised two children, Katherine and John, before divorcing in 1993. In 1970, New York Mayor John Lindsay appointed Eleanor Holmes Norton to chair the New York City Commission on Human Rights.² In 1977, President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter appointed her chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, where she served until 1981; she was the first woman to chair the commission. During the 1980s, she was a full-time tenured professor at Georgetown University Law Center, where she still teaches one course annually.

In 1990, Norton defeated five challengers in the Democratic primary for an open seat as the District of Columbia's Delegate in the U.S. House. In the general election, she won 62 percent of the vote in the heavily Democratic city. She has faced little or no opposition in nine re-election bids.³

When Norton entered the 102nd Congress (1991–1993), she won assignments on three committees: District of Columbia, Post Office and Civil Service, and Transportation and Infrastructure. In the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), she was appointed to the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress. In 1995, the District of Columbia Committee was absorbed by the Government Reform Committee (later renamed Oversight and Government Reform), where Norton now serves. In the 108th Congress (2003–2005), Norton won a seat on the Homeland Security Committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), she chairs the Transportation Committee’s Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management.

For the first time in the city’s history, Norton won a vote as Delegate on the House Floor in the Committee of the Whole through a new rule she requested. In subsequent decisions, the federal courts ruled that the House could grant Delegates the right to vote in the House Floor committee by rule, as it had traditionally in other committees. This vote was withdrawn in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) when the Republicans assumed control of the House, but was returned in the 110th Congress when the Democrats resumed control. Current House rules allow Delegates full participation in the legislative process, excepting full voting rights on the House Floor. Delegates may introduce legislation, speak on the House Floor, and even chair committees. Yet Norton is the only Member of Congress whose constituents have no final congressional vote, although they pay federal income taxes and serve in the military.

Norton has been a vocal and articulate leader in the fight to secure DC statehood and voting rights and to improve the city’s services and infrastructure.⁴ In an effort to win statehood for the District, she authored the New Columbia Admission Act, which went to an unsuccessful vote on the House Floor. She then sponsored the No Taxation Without Representation Act for congressional votes, a bill that was also introduced in the Senate. In 2007, the House passed a bipartisan bill sponsored by Norton and Representative Tom Davis of Virginia to create House seats for largely Republican Utah and the mostly Democratic District of Columbia. (The bill is pending in the Senate.) She successfully fought congressional initiatives to nullify local laws, including repeals of the city’s ban on handguns, the use of local funds to lobby or seek court relief for congressional voting rights, and needle exchange programs to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.⁵

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Barack Obama
1961–

UNITED STATES SENATOR
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

2005–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

In July 2004, after delivering a stirring keynote address at the Democratic National Convention, Barack Obama burst onto the national political scene, later winning a landslide victory to become a U.S. Senator from Illinois. He is only the fifth African American in congressional history to serve in the U.S. Senate.

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 4, 1961, the son of Barack Obama, Sr., and Ann Dunham Obama. Barack, Sr., an economist, was born and raised in Kenya and grew up raising goats with his father, who was a domestic servant for the British.¹ He met and married Ann Dunham, who grew up in a small town in Kansas, while both were students at the University of Hawaii. When Obama, Jr., was two years old, his father left to attend Harvard. Soon thereafter his parents divorced. He lived for a while in Jakarta, Indonesia, when his mother remarried to an Indonesian oil manager. The family resettled in Hawaii, where Obama attended the Punahou Academy. From 1979 to 1981, he attended Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, before completing a bachelor of arts in political science at Columbia University in 1983. He moved to Chicago in 1985 to work for a church-based group that sought to improve living conditions in impoverished neighborhoods. He then attended Harvard Law School, serving as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review*. In 1991, he graduated with his J.D. and married the former Michelle Robinson. The couple have two daughters, Malia and Sasha.²

Obama entered local politics through his work as a community activist in a blighted South Side Chicago neighborhood. He practiced civil rights law and lectured at the University of Chicago Law School. In 1996, he was elected to the Illinois state senate. He served in that capacity from 1997 through 2004, pushing through a state earned income tax credit and an expansion of early childhood education. In 2000, he unsuccessfully challenged four-term incumbent U.S. Representative Bobby Rush in the Democratic primary for a seat representing most of Chicago's South Side.

In 2004, after incumbent U.S. Senator Peter Fitzgerald, a Republican, announced his retirement, Obama joined a crowded field of candidates in the Democratic primary for the open seat. He garnered 53 percent of the vote, topping two favored candidates—State Comptroller Daniel Hynes and a wealthy securities trader, Blair Hull (who spent \$29 million on his campaign). Obama emerged as a national figure during that campaign, delivering a rousing keynote address on the second night of the Democratic National Convention in the summer of 2004, when he dared Americans to have “the audacity of hope.” He explained, “It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs. The hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores. . . . The hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.” Obama won a landslide 70 percent of the vote against Republican candidate Alan Keyes.³

When Obama took his seat at the start of the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he received assignments on three committees: Foreign Relations, Environment and Public Works, and Veterans’ Affairs. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Obama left the Environment and Public Works panel and earned two additional committee posts: Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. During the 110th Congress he also served as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on European Affairs.

During his first three years in the Senate, Obama focused on issues such as lobbying and ethics reform, veterans’ benefits, energy, nuclear nonproliferation, and government transparency. From his seat on the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Obama secured disability pay for veterans and advocated greater services and assistance for returning service members who served in Iraq. As a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, Senator Obama sought to reinvigorate a national dialogue about developing more-energy-efficient vehicles and alternative energy sources. On the Foreign Relations Committee, he worked with then-Chairman Richard Lugar of Indiana to initiate a new round of nonproliferation efforts designed to find and secure nuclear and conventional weapons around the world.

In February 2007, Senator Obama announced his intention to run as a candidate for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Donald M. Payne

1934–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW JERSEY

1989–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Donald M. Payne, the first African American to represent New Jersey in the U.S. Congress, has emerged as a stalwart advocate for federal funding for education as well as greater U.S. engagement in Africa. An experienced community activist and Newark elected official, Payne succeeded one of the House's most recognizable figures, longtime House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino, Jr., after his 1988 retirement.

Donald Milford Payne was born on July 16, 1934, in Newark, New Jersey, the son of William Evander Payne, a dockworker, and Norma Garrett Payne. He grew up in Doodletown, an Italian-American section of Newark. Payne later recalled, "Everyone, whites and blacks, worked for low wages, although we didn't think of it as living in poverty, and there was a real sense of neighborhood, of depending on one another."¹ As a teenager, Payne joined a group called "The Leaguers," which sought to assist inner-city youth by providing social, educational, and work activities.² The founders, Reynold and Mary Burch, were prominent African Americans in Newark and helped Payne secure a four-year scholarship at Seton Hall University. Payne graduated in 1957 with a degree in social studies, and later pursued graduate studies at Springfield College in Massachusetts. On June 15, 1958, he married Hazel Johnson, who died in 1963. Donald Payne never remarried and has three adult children. He taught English and social studies and coached football and track in the Newark public school system before working for a major insurance company. He later served as a vice president of a computer forms manufacturing company founded by his brother.

Payne became involved in politics at age 19 as manager of his brother William's successful campaign to serve as Newark's first African-American district leader.³ He pursued community work through the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). From 1970 to 1973, Payne served as president of the YMCA of the United States; he was the first black to hold that position. In 1972, he was elected to the Essex County board of chosen freeholders. During his six years as a freeholder, he eventually chaired the board. In 1982, Payne won election to the city council of Newark.

Payne twice challenged Representative Rodino in the Democratic primary for a U.S. House seat encompassing Newark and portions of Essex County. Arguing that the New Jersey congressional delegation was not representative of the racial composition of the state, Payne failed to unseat Rodino in 1980 and 1986.⁴ In 1988, however, when Rodino announced his retirement, Payne became a leading contender for the nomination to fill the vacant seat. In the June 1988 Democratic primary, he defeated Ralph T. Grant by a two to one ratio. In a district that voted overwhelmingly Democratic, Payne defeated Republican opponent Michael Webb with 77 percent of the vote in the general election.⁵ In his subsequent nine re-election campaigns, he has won by similar margins.⁶

After Payne was sworn in to the House on January 3, 1989, he received assignments on the Education and Labor Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee. He has served on the Education and Labor Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee throughout his House career. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he assumed the chairman's gavel of the Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. Payne has served on the Democratic Steering Committee, which determines individual committee assignments for Democratic House Members and shapes the party's legislative agenda. As a past chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, he developed a reputation as being thoughtful, determined, and low-key. "I think there is a lot of dignity in being able to achieve things without having to create rapture," he once noted. Payne also is a member of the Democratic Whip organization.⁷

Representative Payne's legislative interests include both domestic and foreign initiatives. Among the successful measures he has helped shape from his seat on the Education and Labor Committee are the Goals 2000 initiative to improve the quality of education, the Student Loan Bill, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the National Service Act.⁸ An advocate for inner-city redevelopment, Payne is a leading critic of civil rights crimes, racial profiling, and police brutality. As a senior member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Payne emerged as a forceful advocate for U.S. sanctions against the Sudanese government—particularly during a period of genocide in the Darfur region in 2004. He also has prodded both the William J. (Bill) Clinton and George W. Bush administrations for increased foreign aid for economic development and health care improvements in Africa.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Charles B. Rangel

1930–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW YORK

1971–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

As dean of the New York State delegation, Representative Charles Rangel is one of the five most senior Members in the House of Representatives and the second-longest-serving African American in congressional history. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Rangel became the first African American to chair the powerful Ways and Means Committee and is one of a small group of blacks who have chaired multiple congressional committees.

Charles Rangel was born on June 11, 1930, in Harlem, New York City. The second of three children, he was raised by his mother, who was born Blanche Wharton, and his maternal grandfather, Charles Wharton. From 1948 to 1952, Rangel served in the U.S. Army and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart in the Korean War after being wounded and leading 40 U.S. soldiers from behind enemy lines.¹ After graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School, Rangel, in 1957, earned a bachelor of science degree from New York University under the GI bill. Three years later, he completed a J.D. at St. John's University Law School. In 1960 Rangel passed the New York Bar and began practicing law. In 1963, he was appointed Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. He later served as counsel to the speaker of the New York assembly and on the President's Commission to Revise the Draft Laws. On July 26, 1964, Rangel married the former Alma Carter. They raised two children, Steven and Alicia. They have three grandsons.

Rangel's interest in politics was piqued by his work for the state assembly and the New York City housing and redevelopment board, and by his service as a legal adviser to many individuals in the civil rights movement. In 1966, he ran successfully for a seat in the New York assembly, representing central Harlem. During his two terms in Albany, Rangel emerged as a leading advocate for inner-city constituents while forging a bipartisan friendship with Republican Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller.²

In the 1970 Democratic primary, Rangel narrowly defeated renowned veteran U.S. Representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., for his Harlem-based seat and prevailed in the general election. Powell had represented the district—encompassing Harlem, East Harlem, the Upper West Side, Washington Heights, and Inwood—since its creation in 1944. In his subsequent 18 re-election campaigns, Rangel won by lopsided majorities of 87 percent or more.³

Rangel took his seat at the opening of the 92nd Congress (1971–1973). In the 94th Congress (1975–1977), he became the first African-American member of the prestigious Ways and Means Committee, which writes federal tax law, and ascended to the chairmanship in 2007. He also was assigned to the Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control in 1975 and chaired that panel from the 98th through the 102nd Congresses (1981–1993). Rangel cofounded the Congressional Black Caucus, serving as the group's chairman in the 94th Congress.

Representative Rangel emerged as a forceful critic of the drug trade and illicit drug use. He also focused on opening up economic opportunities for minority groups and the poor. He authored a 1993 provision providing tax breaks to promote investments and jobs in inner-city neighborhoods called “empowerment zones.” Rangel authored the Low Income Housing Tax Credit—a measure that significantly boosted affordable housing built in the United States.⁴ For veterans, Rangel founded the Office of Minority Affairs in the Veterans Administration.

In 1987, Rangel contributed to the demise of the apartheid government of South Africa as the author of the “Rangel Amendment.” Denying certain tax benefits to U.S. corporations, the legislation forced major U.S. companies to withdraw from the country, weakening the government and clearing the way for the emergence of democracy. In 2000, the Representative's historic African Growth and Opportunity Act became law, providing for the first time incentives for U.S. trade with sub-Saharan Africa. He also founded the Rangel State Department Fellows Program, which has significantly increased the representation of minorities in the U.S. Foreign Service.

As part of an economic stimulus bill to rejuvenate the U.S. economy after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Rangel managed to extend unemployment benefits for workers; this was particularly important to those in the travel and lodging industries in New York.⁵ Rangel has brought millions of dollars into his district, helping to spur the economic revitalization of Harlem.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Bobby L. Rush
1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM ILLINOIS

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

As a founder of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, an ally in Harold Washington's effort to topple the Daley Democratic machine in Chicago, and a Member of Congress, Bobby Rush has devoted his political career to bringing a measure of power to those disfranchised from the political system. An eight-term Member of the House, Representative Rush serves on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. "My life's mission, my life's meaning, my life's definition," he once said, "is that I am a fighter for the people."¹

Bobby L. Rush was born on November 23, 1946, in Albany, Georgia, the son of Cora Lee, a beautician and teacher, and Jimmy Lee Rush, a taxi driver. At age seven, he and his four siblings moved to Chicago with his divorced mother.² His mother was a Republican precinct leader, largely because whites dominated the local Democratic machine.³ In 1963, he joined the U.S. Army, serving five years before receiving an honorable discharge. During the 1960s civil rights movement, Rush was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1968, he left SNCC to cofound the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, a militant group that fought for political and economic equality. Rush helped initiate nonviolent projects in African-American communities, including a medical clinic that screened patients for sickle-cell anemia. "We were resistant to police brutality, to the historical relationship between African Americans and recalcitrant, racist whites," Rush recalled years later. Rush left the Black Panther Party in 1974 because he opposed its growing emphasis on violence and drug use. Rush earned a B.A. degree in political science from Roosevelt University in Chicago in 1973. In 1994, he earned an M.A. in political science from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and four years later he completed an M.A. in theological studies from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Rush, an ordained minister, and his wife of 28 years, Carolyn, have six children. One of their sons was murdered in 1999.

Rush made unsuccessful bids for the Chicago city council and the Illinois state house of representatives, but in 1983, his longtime friend U.S. Representative Harold Washington was elected mayor of Chicago, marking a moment of black ascendancy in Chicago politics. At the same time, Rush was elected alderman in the city's South Side 2nd Ward. By the time Washington died in office in 1987, Rush had built a formidable political base.⁴

In 1992, Rush challenged Representative Charles Hayes, a five-term veteran, in the Democratic primary. The district encompassed much of the African-American South Side in addition to several Irish-American communities. Rush defeated Hayes in the primary by three percentage points.⁵ In the general election, he won handily against his Republican opponent, with 83 percent of the vote. In his seven re-election efforts since, he has won 76 percent of the vote or more, including 87 percent in his 2006 re-election campaign.⁶

As a freshman Representative, Rush received assignments on three committees: Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs; Government Operations; and Science, Space, and Technology. He left those assignments in the 104th Congress (1995–1997) for a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee, where he has remained. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he was appointed Chairman of its Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection. Rush's Democratic freshman class colleagues elected him class president in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), and he has been part of the Whip organization since he entered the House.

By his own estimate, Rush has brought more than \$2 billion in federal money into his district since 1993.⁷ As a freshman Member, Rush introduced legislation that passed the House as the Community Development and Regulatory Act. An advocate for improved access to health care for underserved populations, Rush has passed measures such as the Urban Asthma Reduction Act of 1999. In his first year as Subcommittee Chairman, Rush passed H.R. 20, the Melanie Blocker-Stokes Postpartum Depression Research and Care Act. Rush supports gun control and opposes the death penalty, and has introduced H.R. 2666, the Blair Holt Firearm Licensing and Record of Sale Act, a measure aimed at registering every gun sold in the United States.

While backing government programs to expand economic opportunities in urban communities, Rush does not view the federal government as a panacea. "Government is not going to solve all the problems that afflict the African American community," Rush noted. "We must look within ourselves, first and foremost. Capacity building and maintenance must become the top priority, both economically and politically, especially through entrepreneurship and education."

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

David Scott
1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM GEORGIA

2003–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

A 28-year veteran of the Georgia legislature, David Scott won election to the U.S. House in 2002 as a centrist Democrat representing a newly created district in suburban Atlanta. Scott's appeal in a racially mixed district illustrated the revolution in southern politics that occurred after the 1960s civil rights movement, when large portions of his district voted for George Wallace. "I want to be viewed as a Representative who happens to be African American, but one who represents all the people," Scott said.¹

David Albert Scott was born on June 27, 1946, in Aynor, South Carolina. His father was a preacher and a chauffeur, and his mother was a maid and a hospital worker. He attended grade school in the northeast, settling with his parents as they took jobs in Scarsdale, New York. The experience was formative. Scott noted, "I learned at a very young age how to have confidence in myself and how to get along with people who don't look like me."² Scott graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in English and speech from Florida A&M University in 1967. As an intern at the Labor Department in Washington, DC, he met George W. Taylor, an influential labor management expert. Taylor suggested Scott apply to the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, where Taylor taught. In 1969, Scott received an M.B.A. from Wharton. Scott married the former Alfredia Aaron, the youngest sister of professional baseball's longtime homerun king Hank Aaron. They raised two daughters, Dayna and Marcye.

Scott's political work began in an advisory role when, for several years, he consulted for then-Governor James Earl (Jimmy) Carter of Georgia on revenue policy. In 1972, he worked on Andrew Young's successful congressional campaign. Two years later, Scott was elected to the Georgia house of representatives, where he served through 1982. He then was elected to the Georgia senate, where he served from 1983 until 2002—eventually chairing the prestigious rules committee. He authored a law that gave breast cancer patients and their doctors ultimate control over determining hospitalization and treatment measures to combat the disease as well as a law that allowed local communities to fight landfill developments.³

David Scott entered the race in 2002 for a newly reapportioned U.S. House district that surrounded metro Atlanta, including large parts of Fulton, Gwinnett, and Clayton counties. The district—the result of the spectacular growth of suburban Atlanta in the 1990s—also reached into eight other surrounding counties, drawing in communities that had seen a rise in the African-American population during the 1990s. The new district was 42 percent white, 41 percent black, and 10 percent Hispanic. Largely middle class with affluent pockets, it had a strong Democratic tilt. Scott faced two formidable rivals, a former state Democratic Party chairman and a popular state senator, whom the Party backed in the primary. Scott also tapped his experience as an advertising executive—organizing a billboard campaign that reached thousands of drivers who used the major interstates that crossed the spidery district. Scott prevailed in the primary and won the general election with 60 percent of the vote. He was re-elected in 2004 with no major party opposition, and won 69 percent of the vote in his successful 2006 campaign.⁴

After Representative Scott was sworn in to the U.S. House in January 2003, he received assignments on the Financial Services Committee and the Agriculture Committee. By the start of the 109th Congress (2005–2007), he was the second-ranking member on the Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Scott joined the Foreign Affairs Committee, where he serves as Vice Chair of the Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Subcommittee. He is also a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Congressional Black Caucus, the Blue Dog Coalition, and the New Democrats.⁵

In the House, Representative Scott has earned a reputation as a problem solver. “It’s very important that our party do two things,” Scott told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* just weeks after he took his seat. “One, we’ve got to command the center. Secondly, we’ve got to energize our base.”⁶ He was one of just a handful of Democrats to vote for the Medicare overhaul bill, which provided prescription drug benefits for millions of American seniors. Among Scott’s legislative undertakings have been his lead sponsorship of H.R. 916, the John R. Justice Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act, which provides student loan assistance to attorneys who work in public service, as well as the Financial Literacy for Homeowners Act, which seeks to increase homeowners’ knowledge about their mortgages. Further, Representative Scott sponsors annual health fairs and jobs fairs to help bring wellness and economic assistance to his constituents.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Robert C. Scott

1947–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM VIRGINIA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Robert Cortez Scott was born in Washington, DC, on April 30, 1947, the son of Charles Waldo Scott, a doctor, and Mae Hamlin Scott, a teacher. He was raised in Newport News, Virginia. When Virginia officials resisted court-ordered public school integration in the late 1950s, Scott's parents sent him to Groton School, a college preparatory school in Massachusetts.¹ He graduated with a B.A. in liberal arts from Harvard University in the class of 1969 and four years later earned his J.D. at Boston College Law School.² While in law school, Scott served in the Massachusetts National Guard and later in the U.S. Army Reserve. After law school, he resettled in Newport News and opened a private law practice. From 1975 to 1980, Scott served as president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1977, he won election to the Virginia house of delegates. He served there for five years until his election to the Virginia senate, where he served for another decade. Scott is divorced and has no children. He is a member of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Newport News, Virginia.

Scott's first attempt to win national office took place in 1986, when he challenged two-term Republican incumbent Herbert H. Bateman for a seat in the U.S. House. The campaign garnered wide name recognition for Scott, although he lost the general election by a margin of 56 to 44 percent.³ Following the 1990 Census, Virginia underwent reapportionment that increased its congressional delegation from 10 to 11. In order to comply with the Voting Rights Act, the Virginia assembly created a majority-black district that ran from southeast Richmond into portions of Newport News and Norfolk at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay in southeastern

Virginia. Scott, who had represented portions of the new district in the state legislature, ran for the seat. In the Democratic primary, he received two-thirds of the vote, defeating two African-American women—a house of delegates member and the chair of the state retirement system. In the general election, he prevailed handily over Republican candidate Daniel Jenkins, with 79 percent of the vote.⁴ Scott was the first black since John Mercer Langston (1890–1891) to represent the state and (because of his Filipino ancestry on his mother’s side of the family) the first American of Filipino heritage to serve as a U.S. Representative.⁵ Despite court-ordered redistricting in 1997, Scott has never been seriously challenged in his seven re-election bids. In 1998, in the reapportioned district, Scott won with a 78 percent majority. In 2006, Scott won with 96 percent of the vote against write-in candidates.⁶

When Scott was sworn in to the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he was appointed to three committees: Judiciary; Education and Labor; and Science, Space, and Technology. He served on the Science, Space, and Technology Committee for one term (1993–1995) and continues to serve on the Judiciary Committee and the Education and Labor Committee—though he took a leave of absence from the Education and Labor Committee during the 108th Congress (2003–2005) to serve on the prestigious Budget Committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), he serves on the Education and Labor, Budget, and Judiciary committees and as chairman on the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

Representative Scott earned a reputation as a forthright progressive, opposing efforts to amend the Constitution to outlaw flag desecration and promote prayer in public schools.⁷ He is also a strong advocate of reforming the juvenile justice system and of reducing crime by using prevention and intervention strategies. Scott has consistently fought against discrimination in employment by organizations that use federal funds. In 1997, Scott was a leading proponent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which seeks to protect the right of children with disabilities to a free, appropriate public education. He also sponsored the Death in Custody Act, signed into law in 2000, which requires states to report the death of individuals apprehended or held by police.⁸ Scott has been a proponent of business interests in his district, which include major military and shipbuilding facilities such as the army’s Fort Eustis and the Hampton Roads shipyards.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Bennie Thompson
1948–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MISSISSIPPI

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

A veteran of Mississippi politics for nearly 40 years, Bennie Thompson is an eight-term Member of the U.S. House and chairman of the Homeland Security Committee. Having grown up in the segregated South, Thompson has watched Mississippi government evolve from an era when blacks had no political clout to the present, when African Americans hold a number of the state's elective offices. His congressional career has focused on the interests of his largely agricultural constituency and on improved access for minorities to economic opportunities and health care.

Bennie G. Thompson was born in Bolton, Mississippi, on January 28, 1948, to Will and Annie Lauris Thompson. He grew up in an all-black neighborhood and was educated in segregated schools. His father, who died when Bennie was a teenager, was an auto mechanic, and his mother was a teacher. In 1968, he graduated from Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi, with a bachelor of arts degree in political science. In college, he was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and volunteered on the congressional campaign of famed civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer. Though Hamer did not win election to Congress, her example and the experience of registering African Americans in southern voting drives inspired Thompson to pursue a career in politics.¹ He earned a master of science degree in educational administration from Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1973. Thompson later pursued doctoral work in public administration at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Thompson married his college sweetheart, London Johnson, a schoolteacher, and they raised one daughter, BendaLonne.² He briefly worked as a public school teacher in Madison, Mississippi, but when he won election to the board of aldermen in Bolton, Mississippi, white officials challenged the election in court and forced Thompson to resign his teaching position. The courts upheld the election results, and Thompson served as a town alderman from 1969 to 1973, when he won election as the town's mayor. He served in that capacity for six years. In 1980, Thompson was elected to the Hinds County board of supervisors, where he served 13 years.

In 1993, when four-term Democratic Representative Mike Espy of Mississippi resigned his seat to become Secretary of Agriculture in the William J. (Bill) Clinton administration, Thompson entered the race for the open seat. The district encompassed west-central Mississippi, taking in urban areas such as Jackson, the state capital, and a nearly 230-mile stretch of agriculturally dependent communities along the Mississippi Delta that included some of the poorest counties in the country. On the Democratic side, his two principal contenders were Henry Espy, the brother of former Representative Mike Espy, and James Meredith, a 1960s civil rights activist and the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi. In the all-party open primary in March 1993, GOP candidate Hayes Dent won with a 34 percent plurality. Thompson was second, with 28 percent. In accordance with state election law, the top two finishers squared off in the April 13 special election. Henry Espy threw his support behind Thompson, who worked hard to turn out the African-American vote. Thompson prevailed against Dent, with a 55 percent majority.³ In his subsequent seven re-election bids, Thompson has won by comfortable margins. In 2006, he won election to his seventh term, with 64 percent of the vote, against Republican candidate Yvonne R. Brown.⁴

Representative Thompson claimed his seat in the House on April 20, 1993, and received assignments on three committees: Agriculture, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, and Small Business. Thompson remained on the Agriculture Committee through the 108th Congress (2003–2005). In the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Thompson was assigned to the influential Budget Committee, where he remained until he won a seat on the newly created Select Committee on Homeland Security. In 2005, when Homeland Security became a standing House committee, Democrats tapped Thompson as the panel's Ranking Member. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Thompson became the first-ever Democratic chairman of the committee.

Representative Thompson has sought federal dollars for infrastructure improvements, access to improved health care, and better schools for his district. In 2000, Thompson was a lead author and sponsor of a measure that created the National Center for Minority Health and Health Care Disparities. From his seat on the Agriculture Committee, Thompson, with support from the Congressional Black Caucus, prodded the Agriculture Department to disburse more federal aid to minorities, who Thompson argued have been discriminated against for decades. He also has been a leading defender of affirmative action programs.⁵

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Edolphus Towns

1934–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NEW YORK

1983–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Edolphus Towns, a former social worker and community activist in Brooklyn, New York, serves as a 13-term veteran in the House, where he holds an assignment on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. In the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Towns was appointed chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee's Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement. He has focused on issues such as education, health care, and better access to technology for minorities.

Edolphus (Ed) Towns was born on July 21, 1934, in Chadbourn, North Carolina, the son of Versie and Dolphus Towns. His father was a sharecropper in a region where tobacco was an important agricultural product. Edolphus attended the local public schools, graduating from West Side High School in 1952. Towns earned a bachelor of science degree from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro in 1956. Towns later earned a master's degree in social work from Adelphi University in Garden City, New York. For two years after college, he served in the U.S. Army. After being discharged in 1958, Towns taught at Medgar Evers College and Fordham University in New York City, and in the city's public schools. He also worked as a program director and administrator in two city hospitals, from 1965 to 1975. Towns married the former Gwendolyn Forbes in 1960, and they have two children, Darryl and Deidra.

Edolphus Towns entered politics through his work in various civic associations. He held his first political position beginning in 1972 when he won election as the Democratic state committeeman for the New York 40th Assembly District in Brooklyn. In 1976, he was appointed Brooklyn's first African-American deputy borough president, where he served until 1982.

In 1982, Towns entered the Democratic primary for a newly created seat representing portions of the northern and eastern sections of Brooklyn, including Williamsburg, Bushwick, and Fort Greene. In the majority-black and Hispanic district, Towns defeated two Hispanic candidates, with roughly 50 percent of the vote.¹ In the general election, Towns was heavily favored and defeated Republican James W. Smith, with 84 percent of the vote. Towns has won by large pluralities in

subsequent general elections, claiming 85 percent of the vote or more in his 12 re-election bids.² He was challenged several times in Democratic primaries (particularly after his 1997 endorsement of Republican Rudolph Giuliani for mayor); the toughest challenges occurred in the 1998 and 2000 primaries, when he defeated lawyer Barry Ford by margins of 16 and 14 percent, respectively.³ Redistricting following the 2000 Census brought in part of Midwood in south-central Brooklyn and bolstered Towns's base. The current district is one of the state's most diverse, comprising black, Hispanic, Caribbean, and Jewish voters, and is solidly Democratic: The Democratic Party has a 13 to 1 registration advantage.⁴

When Representative Towns took his seat in the House on January 3, 1983, he was assigned to three committees: Government Operations (later renamed Oversight and Government Reform), Public Works and Transportation, and the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. Towns has remained on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee for his entire House career. In the 101st Congress (1989–1991), he won a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee, where he has remained since. At the end of the 104th Congress (1995–1997), Towns left his Public Works and Transportation assignment.

Representative Towns's legislative interests have included education, health care, financial services, and the environment. Among his legislative accomplishments, Towns counts the Student Right to Know Act, which mandates that colleges report student athlete graduation rates.⁵ In the 107th Congress (2001–2003), Towns introduced a measure to place sports agents under the oversight of the Federal Trade Commission in an effort to stop unethical recruitment practices.⁶ He has secured federal funding for programs for the gifted and talented and for bilingual education as well as for enhanced teacher training. Towns helped create the Telecommunications Development Fund to provide capital to small and minority-owned businesses that provide high technology. In addition, in recent Congresses he has sponsored a measure to implement technology upgrades at historically black colleges and those that serve minorities generally.⁷

Representative Towns and his son, Darryl, a New York state assemblyman, are the first African-American father–son team to serve simultaneously in New York public office.

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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Maxine Waters
1938–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

1991–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

On the “My Hero” Web site, a young woman named Michelle calls U.S. Representative Maxine Waters a “community hero,” explaining, “[Waters] instills the belief that you can achieve whatever you wish as long as you really strive to do so.”¹ In fact, over three decades, Representative Waters has become one of the nation’s most tenacious, unapologetic advocates for women, children, the poor, economic development, communities of color, human rights, and civil rights.

Waters’s passionate commitment to social and economic justice can be traced to the struggles her family faced during her youth. Maxine Carr was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on August 15, 1938, the fifth of 13 children. “I know all about welfare,” she recalled. “I remember the social workers peeking in the refrigerator and under the beds.”² Although she has compiled a long list of significant accomplishments and is considered one of the most powerful women in American politics, she still remembers starting work at age 13 in factories and segregated restaurants. It is perhaps her first-hand experience that has made her one of the nation’s most effective grass-roots organizers.

Waters moved to California in 1961 and, in 1970, earned a B.A. in sociology from California State University at Los Angeles. During that time, she launched her career in public service with the Head Start program, where she eventually coordinated the Parent Involvement Program. In 1976, Waters was elected to the California state assembly, where she became the first woman in state history to be elected minority whip. She eventually became chair of the Democratic caucus. As an assemblywoman, she successfully spearheaded efforts to implement the first statewide training program in the country to prevent child abuse, the largest divestment of state pension funds from South Africa, landmark affirmative action legislation, and the prohibition of strip searches by police of individuals charged with nonviolent misdemeanors.

In 1990, Waters was elected to fill the congressional seat vacated by retiring U.S. Representative Augustus (Gus) Hawkins, the first African American to represent California in the national legislature. She captured 79 percent of the vote and has not been seriously challenged since, capturing similar percentages in eight subsequent re-election campaigns.³

As a Member of Congress, Waters has provided \$10 billion under the Section 108 loan guarantee program for economic and infrastructure development in U.S. cities, tripled funding for debt relief in poor nations, obtained \$50 million for the Youth Fair Chance Program, created the Center for Women Veterans, and established the Minority AIDS Initiative. Additionally, Waters has been a leader on global peace and international human rights issues and remains actively involved in efforts to improve the plight of oppressed individuals in conflict-torn nations like Sudan, Haiti, and Liberia.

Waters's efforts have been noticed by her congressional colleagues. In 1997, she won the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, and later her Democratic colleagues elected her to the post of Chief Deputy Minority Whip. She serves on the influential House Committee on the Judiciary and she is the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee on Financial Services.⁴ Waters has sponsored important measures on housing and community development, including legislation to reform the Section 8 voucher program, legislation to modernize the Federal Housing Administration, and legislation to improve the HOPE VI public housing revitalization program. Additional legislation includes the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act of 2007 (SEVRA), reforms in the Expanding Homeownership Act of 2007, and the HOPE VI Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2007.

By the 110th Congress (2007–2009), Representative Waters was a leading member of the Democratic Party. She acquired that status by amplifying her record of advocacy at the local and state levels to become “a community activist in Congress,” in the words of an observer.⁵ In 2005, Waters cofounded and was elected chair of the 72-member Out of Iraq Congressional Caucus. One of the largest caucuses in the House of Representatives, Out of Iraq was established to consistently pressure the George W. Bush administration, to provide a voice in Congress for individuals and organizations opposed to the Iraq War, and, ultimately, to end the war and reunite U.S. troops with their families as soon as possible. Waters's family is extremely important to her. She is married to Sidney Williams, the former U.S. Ambassador to the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. She is the mother of two adult children, Karen and Edward, and has two grandchildren.

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MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

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- 2 *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2005): 261.
- 3 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 4 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 139–140; “About Congresswoman Waters,” <http://www.house.gov/waters/bio/> (accessed 5 December 2007).
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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Diane Edith Watson

1933–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM CALIFORNIA

2001–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Formerly an educator, a state legislator, and a U.S. ambassador, Diane Watson entered the U.S. House of Representatives as an unusually experienced freshman. From her seats on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Watson quickly established herself as a legislator whose interests ranged from welfare reform to foreign aid for African nations facing the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Diane Edith Watson was born on November 12, 1933, in Los Angeles, California, the daughter of William Allen Louis Watson and Dorothy Elizabeth O’Neal Watson. She graduated with an A.A. from Los Angeles City College and a B.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1956. Watson later earned an M.S. from California State University in 1967 and a Ph.D. in education administration from Claremont College in 1986. After graduating from UCLA, Watson worked as a teacher and a school psychologist in the Los Angeles public schools. She was an associate professor at California State University from 1969 to 1971 and then worked in the California department of education and served on the Los Angeles unified school board. Watson won election as a state senator in 1978, an office she held for 20 years. She was the first African-American woman in the state senate and chaired the health and human services committee. In 1998, President William J. (Bill) Clinton nominated her as U.S. Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia, a post she held for two years.

In December 2000, U.S. Representative Julian Dixon, who had just been re-elected to a 12th term in Congress from his central Los Angeles–Culver City district, died. In April 2001, Watson prevailed with a 33 percent plurality in the special Democratic primary to choose Dixon’s successor, while her nearest competitor received 26 percent.¹ In the June 5, 2001, special election, Watson carried the heavily Democratic Los Angeles district with 75 percent of the vote. In her three subsequent re-election bids, Watson has won her district with more than 80 percent of the vote.²

When Watson was sworn in to the U.S. House on June 7, 2001, she was assigned seats on the Government Reform Committee (now the Oversight and Government Reform Committee) and the International Relations Committee

(now the Foreign Affairs Committee). As a former ambassador, she took a keen interest in American foreign policy, particularly as it related to issues of racism and health in the developing world. In the summer of 2001, Watson attended the United Nations Conference on Racism, Xenophobia, and Other Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. She called on the United States to host its own conference on racism and reform to the education, justice, and health care systems, to make “reparations” for the practice of American slavery.³ In early 2002, Watson took to the House Floor to support the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, noting that incidents of violence against Arab Americans, which had risen since the 2001 terrorist attacks, were “the tip of a proverbial iceberg.”⁴

Watson also called for the United States to expand aid to sub-Saharan African nations fighting an HIV/AIDS pandemic that in some countries had infected more than a quarter of the adult population. Aside from humanitarian considerations, she argued, the crisis had repercussions for regional stability and American national security because of the strain it placed on so many developing economies. The disease, she observed, “in the very near term, if more is not done, may challenge the very notion of law-based nation states.” She also linked the chaos the disease could cause with instability favorable to terrorist actions. “Let us not forget that Al Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden has exploited the misery of another state where civil society has collapsed—Afghanistan—to serve as a base for his terror network,” Watson said.⁵

During the 107th and 108th Congresses (2001–2005), Representative Watson established herself as an advocate for what she describes as “commonsense” welfare reform in California. Watson supported reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, which provides education, childcare, job training, and employment to welfare recipients by providing states with federal funds to develop and manage their own welfare programs. Representative Watson also has been an advocate for increasing funding to the Cal-Learn program to help teen mothers complete their educations and get jobs.⁶ In addition, she introduced several bills, including legislation to develop a state plan for responding to medical disasters in the event of a biological or chemical weapons attack.⁷ She also advocated passage of a plan that would fully fund seniors’ medical prescriptions.

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MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

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- 2 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 3 *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 1st sess. (6 September 2001): 5447.
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- 6 “Meet Congresswoman Diane Watson,” http://www.house.gov/watson/meet_congresswoman.html (accessed 2 January 2005); *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (17 April 2002): 384; *Congressional Record*, House, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (8 May 2002): 2170.
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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Melvin L. Watt

1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM NORTH CAROLINA

1993–



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Melvin Watt, an eight-term House veteran from North Carolina, is a high-ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee and the House Financial Services Committee. He chaired the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in the 109th Congress (2005–2007). A vocal advocate for civil liberties, Watt has sought to build ties to business interests from his seat on the Financial Services Committee.

Melvin L. (Mel) Watt was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on August 26, 1945. He attended segregated public schools in Mecklenburg County. When Watt started college, southern universities had recently been desegregated, so he was among a relatively small number of blacks enrolled in the state university system.¹ He attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, graduating Phi Beta Kappa with a business administration degree in 1967. Three years later, Watt earned his J.D. from Yale Law School. He returned to Charlotte, where he entered the North Carolina bar. For the next 20 years, Watt worked in private practice, specializing in minority business and economic development law.² He eventually served as president of the Mecklenburg County Bar. He married Eulada Paysour and they raised two sons, Brian and Jason. He served a single term in the North Carolina state senate, from 1985 to 1987, but left to spend more time with his teenage sons. Much of Watt's early political work was behind the scenes. He managed the successful campaigns of a rising African-American politician, Charlotte City Councilman and Mayor Harvey Gantt.

After managing Gantt's unsuccessful effort to win a U.S. Senate seat against incumbent Jesse Helms in 1990, Watt ran for elective office himself. In 1992, redistricting created a majority-black (53 percent) congressional district in central North Carolina that stretched through parts of 10 counties and included portions of Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte.³ In a crowded primary field, Watt carried 47 percent of the vote, defeating his closest rival, North Carolina State Representative Mickey Michaux, by 19 percentage points.⁴ Against Republican Barbara Gore Washington, Watt captured 70 percent of the vote in the general election. In his subsequent seven re-election bids, Watt has won by comfortable margins, usually by 65 percent of the vote or more. In 1998, during a controversial effort to reconfigure Watt's district, Watt experienced his narrowest margin of

victory, when he turned back Republican challenger John (Scott) Keadle with 56 percent of the vote. In 2006, Watt was elected to his eighth consecutive term, with 67 percent of the vote.⁵

When Watt entered the U.S. House in January 1993 he received an appointment to the Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs Committee (later renamed Financial Services), where he currently serves as chairman of its Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. He also was assigned to the Judiciary Committee. Watt has served on both panels throughout his House career, and in the 109th Congress he served as Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law. For a single term in the 103rd Congress (1993–1995), he served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee before it was abolished in the following Congress. In addition, Watt has served on the Joint Economic Committee in the 107th and 108th Congresses (2001–2005). In the 109th Congress, Watt was unanimously elected chairman of the CBC.

In Congress, Representative Watt established a reputation as an independent liberal. As a freshman in the 103rd Congress, Watt voted with the Democratic majority nearly 90 percent of the time, although he broke with President William J. (Bill) Clinton to vote against the North American Free Trade Agreement and the administration's 1994 Crime Bill.⁶ During the 1990s, Watt also criticized efforts to dismantle federal welfare programs and some tough crime measures, especially those in support of the death penalty. Watt also backed a universal health care system.⁷

Watt's extensive preparation for and detailed knowledge of legislation being considered are widely recognized by his peers.⁸ On the Judiciary panel, he has vigorously defended constitutional prerogatives and civil liberties. In 2001, shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks, he was one of a minority of House Members to oppose the USA PATRIOT Act, sweeping legislation that granted expanded powers to law enforcement agencies.⁹ On the Financial Services Committee, however, Watt tended to work with Republicans across the aisle and to focus on the business interests, particularly banking, that dominated his district.¹⁰

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- 6 Ellen J. Silberman, "Watt Spent Most of First Term Learning," 4 November 1994, States News Service; Sontakay, "Giving 'Em Mel."
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★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Albert R. Wynn
1951 –

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MARYLAND

1993 –



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

Albert Wynn won election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, in an affluent, predominantly African-American district in suburban Maryland. With a decade of service in the state legislature, Wynn quickly adapted to the U.S. House, eventually earning a seat on the prestigious Energy and Commerce Committee and moving into the hierarchy of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

Albert Russell Wynn was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 10, 1951. His family moved to North Carolina, where his father farmed and his mother taught school.¹ When his father was hired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the family moved to a suburb of Washington, DC, where Wynn attended the public schools in Prince George's County, Maryland. In 1973, Wynn graduated with a bachelor of science degree in political science from the University of Pittsburgh. He briefly studied public administration at Howard University in Washington, DC, before entering Georgetown University and earning a law degree in 1977. Wynn later served as director of the Prince George's County consumer protection commission. After opening his own law firm in 1982, Wynn won election to the Maryland house of delegates, where he served from 1983 to 1987. He was then elected to the Maryland state senate, serving there until 1993 and rising to the post of deputy majority whip. Wynn is married to Gaines Clore Wynn, an artist and art educator. They have two daughters, Meredith and Gabrielle, and a grandson, Kaden Nicholas.

Following the 1990 Census, the Maryland state legislature created a new congressional district that encompassed sections of Prince George's and Montgomery counties inside the Capital Beltway along the border of the District of Columbia. In the 1970s and 1980s, Prince George's County had become increasingly African American as blacks from Washington, DC, moved to the suburbs. Prince George's County was home to a large group of middle- to upper-middle-class African Americans, many of whom were federal workers, and blacks accounted for 58 percent of the heavily Democratic district. In the March 3, 1992, Democratic primary, Wynn garnered 28 percent of the vote, defeating his closest opponent, Prince George's County's State's Attorney Alex Williams, by several percentage points—in large measure because he performed better than Williams in the

Montgomery County sections of the district.² Wynn easily prevailed in the general election, claiming 75 percent of the vote against Republican candidate Michele Dyson, an African-American business consultant. In his subsequent seven re-election bids, Wynn has won with pluralities of 75 percent or more (he received 87 percent of the vote in 1998). Reapportionment after the 2000 Census pulled several heavily Democratic sections out of Wynn's district and added more conservative locales in the suburbs of Montgomery County. Nevertheless, in 2006, Representative Wynn won re-election, with 80 percent of the vote, against Republican challenger Michael Moshe Starkman.³

When Wynn took his seat in the House on January 5, 1993, he received assignments on three committees: Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs (later named Financial Services), Foreign Affairs, and Post Office and Civil Service. In the 105th Congress (1997–1999) Representative Wynn accepted a post on the prestigious Commerce Committee (later named Energy and Commerce), requiring him to yield his prior assignments. He has served on Energy and Commerce since then, and in the 110th Congress (2007–2009) he was appointed chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials. Since 2002, Wynn has chaired the CBC's Political Action Committee and Minority Business Task Force. He heads the CBC task forces on campaign finance reform and minority business and serves as a Senior and Regional Whip.⁴

Wynn's district is home to more federal workers (70,000) than any other district in the country. In addition, a number of small businesses in Wynn's district contract with federal agencies. Much of his legislative focus is on issues affecting that constituency; for instance, Wynn has been a leading advocate for the protection of federal salaries and pensions as well as for the creation of more federal contracts for minority businesses and small businesses. Wynn has also focused on bringing federal dollars into the district for transportation and infrastructure projects.⁵

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