

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick
1945–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MICHIGAN

1997–



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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.

FOR FURTHER READING

"Kilpatrick, Carolyn Cheeks," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000180>.

NOTES

- 1 "Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick," Associated Press Candidate Biographies, 2000; "Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick," *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 16 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc., 1997) (hereinafter referred to as *CBB*).
- 2 "Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick," *CBB*; Hans Johnson and Peggie Rayhawk, *The New Members of Congress Almanac: 105th U.S. Congress* (Washington, DC: Almanac Publishing Inc., 1996): 58.
- 3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 4 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 532; "Official Biography of Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick," <http://www.house.gov/kilpatrick/biography.shtml> (accessed 5 December 2007).
- 5 *Almanac of American Politics, 2002* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2001): 815.
- 6 *Almanac of American Politics, 2002*: 814.