

★ 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

FOR FURTHER READING

“Hastings, Alcee Lamar,” *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000324>.

NOTES

- 1 *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 269–270.
- 2 *Politics in America, 1994* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1993): 384–385.
- 3 *Politics in America, 1994*: 384.
- 4 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 5 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present.”
- 6 “United States Representative Alcee L. Hastings,” http://www.alceehastings.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=68 (accessed 28 November 2007); “Committee Assignments,” http://www.alceehastings.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=101&Itemid=50 (accessed 28 November 2007).
- 7 *Politics in America, 2006*: 269–270; “Official Biography of Alcee L. Hastings,” <http://alceehastings.house.gov/biography> (accessed 28 August 2006).