

★ CURRENT MEMBERS ★

Emanuel Cleaver II

1944–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE
DEMOCRAT FROM MISSOURI

2005–

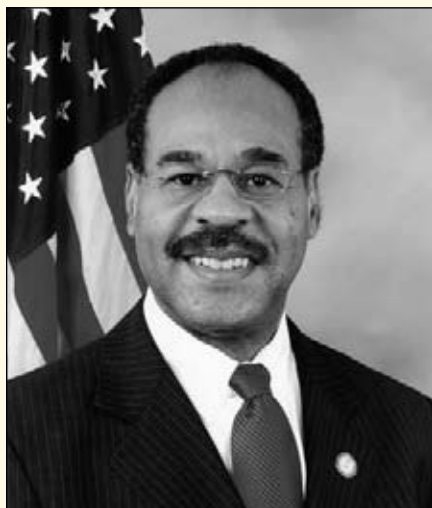


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MEMBER

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 Metzel, 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 Memín Pinguin, a comic book character from the 1940s that evoked racist Jim Crow-Era cartoons of blacks.¹⁰

FOR FURTHER READING

"Cleaver, Emanuel, II," *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, 1774–Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C001061>.

NOTES

- 1 Darrell McWhorter, "A Long March to Kansas City Mayor's Office," 12 May 1991, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch Magazine*: 1C.
- 2 "Official Biography of Emanuel Cleaver II," <http://www.house.gov/cleaver/about.html> (accessed 31 October 2007).
- 3 Steve Kraske, "Cleaver Sees 'Great Cause'; Former KC Mayor Joins Race in 5th Congressional District," 9 February 2004, *Kansas City Star*: B2.
- 4 Steve Kraske, "Cleaver Survives a Fierce Challenge," 4 August 2004, *Kansas City Star*: A1; Steve Kraske, "Cleaver Denounces Campaign 'Vitriol'; Metzl Says Questions 'Need to Be Asked,'" 23 July 2004, *Kansas City Star*: B1; "Rep. Emanuel Cleaver," *Almanac of American Politics, 2006* (Washington, DC: National Journal Inc., 2005): 979–980.
- 5 *Politics in America, 2006* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2005): 596.
- 6 *Politics in America, 2008* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2007): 586.
- 7 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," available at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/index.html.
- 8 *Politics in America, 2008*: 585.
- 9 David Goldstein, "Mr. Cleaver Goes to Washington—and Finds It Highly Perplexing," 29 November 2004, *Kansas City Star*: A1; *Almanac of American Politics, 2006*: 980; *Politics in America, 2006*: 596.
- 10 *Congressional Record*, House, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (19 May 2005): H3589; *Congressional Record*, House, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (11 July 2005): H5630–5633.